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THE · GOOD · COMPANIONS

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THE ENGLISH NOVEL

The

Good Companions

BY

J. B. PRIESTLEY

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To

HUGH WALPOLE

for a friendship that has even
triumphantly survived a collaboration

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BOOK ONE

Chapter One

MR. OAKROYD LEAVES HOME

I

There, far below, is the knobbly backbone of England, the Pennine Range. At first, the whole dark length of it, from the Peak to Cross Fell, is visible. Then the Derbyshire hills and the Cumberland fells disappear, for you are descending, somewhere about the middle of the range, where the high moorland thrusts itself between the woollen mills of Yorkshire and the cotton mills of Lancashire. Great winds blow over miles and miles of ling and bog and black rock, and the curlews still go crying in that empty air as they did before the Romans came. There is a glitter of water here and there, from the moorland tarns that are now called reservoirs. In summer you could wander here all day, listening to the larks, and never meet a soul. In winter you could lose your way in an hour or two and die of exposure perhaps, not a dozen miles from where the Bradford trams end or the Burnley trams begin. Here are Bodkin Top and High Greave and Black Moor and Four Gates End, and though these are lonely places, almost unchanged since the Doomsday Book was compiled, you cannot understand industrial Yorkshire and Lancashire, the wool trade and the cotton trade and many other things besides, such as the popularity of Handel's *Messiah* or the Northern Union Rugby game, without having seen such places. They hide many secrets. Where the moor thins out are patches of ground called "Intake," which means that they are land wrested from the grasp of the moor. Over to the right is a long smudge of smoke, beneath which the towns of the West Riding lie buried, and fleeces, tops, noils, yarns, stuffs, come and go, in and out of the mills, down to the railways and canals and lorries. All this too, you may say, is a kind of Intake.

At first the towns only seem a blacker edge to the high moorland, so many fantastic outcroppings of its rock, but now that you are closer, you see the host of tall chimneys, the rows and rows of little houses, built of blackening stone, that are like tiny sharp ridges on the hills. These windy moors, these clanging dark valleys, these factories and little stone houses, this business of Intaking, have between them bred a race that has special characteristics. Down there are thousands and thousands of men and women who are stocky and hold themselves very stiffly, who have short upper lips and long chins, who use emphatic consonants and very broad vowels and always sound aggressive, who are afraid of nothing but mysterious codes of etiquette and any display of feeling. If it were night, you would notice strange constellations low down in the sky and little golden beetles climbing up to them. These would be street lamps and lighted tramcars on the hills, for here such things are little outposts in No Man's Land and altogether more adventurous and romantic than ordinary street lamps and tramcars. It is not night, however, but a late September afternoon. Some of its sunshine lights up the nearest of the towns, most of it jammed into a narrow valley running up to the moors. It must be Bruddersford, for there, where so many roads meet, is the Town Hall, and if you know the district at all you must immediately recognize the Bruddersford Town Hall, which has a clock that plays *Tom Bowling* and *The Lass of Richmond Hill*. It has been called "a noble building in the Italian Renaissance style" and always looks as if it had no right to be there.

Yes, it is Bruddersford. Over there is the enormous factory of Messrs. Holdsworth and Co., Ltd., which has never been called a noble building in any style but nevertheless looks as if it had a perfect right to be there. The roof of the Midland Railway Station glitters in the sun, and not very far away is another glitter from the glass roof of the Bruddersford Market Hall, where, securely under cover, you may have a ham tea or buy boots and pans and mint humbugs and dress lengths and comic songs. That squat bulk to the left of the Town Hall is the Lane End Congregational Chapel, a monster that can swallow any two thousand people who happen to be in search of "hearty singing and a bright service." That streak of slime must be the Leeds and Liverpool Canal or the Aire and Calder Canal, one of the two. There is a little forest of mill chimneys. Most of them are only puffing meditatively, for it is Saturday afternoon and nearly four hours since the workpeople swarmed out through the big gates. Some of the chimneys show no signs of smoke; they have been quiet for a long time, have stayed there like monuments of an age that has vanished, and all because trade is still bad. Perhaps some of these chimneys have stopped smoking because fashionable women in Paris and London and New York have cried to one another, "My dear, you can't possibly wear that!" and less fashionable women have repeated it after them, and quite unfashionable women have finally followed their example, and it has all ended in machines lying idle in Bruddersford. Certainly, trade is still very bad. But as you look down on Bruddersford, you feel that it will do something about it, that it is only biding its time, that it will hump its way through somehow: the place wears a grim and resolute look. Yet this afternoon it is not thinking about the wool trade.

Something very queer is happening in that narrow thoroughfare to the west of the town. It is called Manchester Road because it actually leads you to that city, though in order to get there you will have to climb to the windy roof of England and spend an hour or two with the curlews. What is so queer about it now is that the road itself cannot be seen at all. A grey-green tide flows sluggishly down its length. It is a tide of cloth caps.

These caps have just left the ground of the Bruddersford United Association Football Club. Thirty-five thousand men and boys have just seen what most of them call "t'United" play Bolton Wanderers. Many of them should never have been there at all. It would not be difficult to prove by statistics and those mournful little budgets (How a Man May Live—or rather, avoid death—on Thirty-five Shillings a Week) that seem to attract some minds, that these fellows could not afford the entrance fee. When some mills are only working half the week and others not at all, a shilling is a respectable sum of money. It would puzzle an economist to discover where all these shillings came from. But if he lived in Bruddersford, though he might still wonder where they came from, he would certainly understand why they were produced. To say that these men paid their shillings to watch twenty-two hirelings kick a ball is merely to say that a violin is wood and cat-gut, that *Hamlet* is so much paper and ink. For a shilling the Bruddersford United A. F. C. offered you Conflict and Art; it turned you into a critic, happy in your judgment of fine points, ready in a second to estimate the worth of a well-judged pass, a run down the touch line, a lightning shot, a clearance kick by back or goalkeeper; it turned you into a partisan, holding your breath when the ball came sailing into your own goalmouth, ecstatic when your forwards raced away towards the opposite goal, elated, downcast, bitter, triumphant by turns at the fortunes of your side, watching a ball shape Iliads and Odysseys for you; and what is more, it turned you into a member of a new community, all brothers together for an hour and a half, for not only had you escaped from the clanking machinery of this lesser life, from work, wages, rent, doles, sick pay, insurance cards, nagging wives, ailing children, bad bosses, idle workmen, but you had escaped with most of your mates and your neighbours, with half the town, and there you were, cheering together, thumping one another on the shoulders, swopping judgments like lords of the earth, having pushed your way through a turnstile into another and altogether more splendid kind of life, hurtling with Conflict and yet passionate and beautiful in its Art. Moreover, it offered you more than a shilling's worth of material for talk during the rest of the week. A man who had missed the last home match of "t'United" had to enter social life on tiptoe in Bruddersford.

Somewhere in the middle of this tide of cloth caps is one that is different from its neighbours. It is neither grey nor green but a rather dirty brown. Then, unlike most of the others, it is not too large for its wearer but, if anything, a shade too small, though it is true he has pushed it back from his forehead as if he were too hot—as indeed he is. This cap and the head it has almost ceased to decorate are both the property of a citizen of Bruddersford, an old and enthusiastic supporter of the United Football Club, whose name is Jesiah Oakroyd. He owes his curious Christian name to his father, a lanky weaving overlooker who divided his leisure, in alternating periods of sin and repentance, between *The Craven Arms* and the Lane End Primitive Methodist Chapel, where he chanced to hear the verse from First *Chronicles,* "Of the sons of Uzziel; Micah the first, and Jesiah the second," the very day before his second son was born. To all his intimates, however, Mr. Oakroyd is known as "Jess." He is a working man between forty-five and fifty years of age, a trifle under medium height but stockily built, neither ugly nor handsome, with a blunt nose, a moustache that may have been once brisk and fair but is now ragged and mousey, and blue eyes that regard the world pleasantly enough but with just a trace of either wonder or resentment or of both. He lives almost in the shadow of two great factories, in one of those districts known locally as "back o' t'mill," to be precise, at 51, Ogden Street. He has lived there these last twenty years, and is known to the whole street as a quiet man and a decent neighbour. He is on his way there now, returning from the match to his Saturday tea, which takes a high rank in the hierarchy of meals, being perhaps second only to Sunday dinner. He has walked this way, home from the match, hundreds of times, but this Saturday in late September is no ordinary day for him—although he does not know it—for it is the very threshold of great events. Chance and Change are preparing an ambush. Only a little way before him there dangles invitingly the end of a thread. He must be followed and watched.

II

As he moved slowly down Manchester Road, the press of fellow spectators still thick about him, Mr. Oakroyd found himself brooding over the hollow vanities of this life. He felt unusually depressed. His physical condition may have had something to do with it, for he was hot, dusty and tired; there had been a full morning's hard work for him at the mill; he had hurried through his dinner; walked to the ground, and had been on his feet ever since. Manchester Road after a match had never seemed so narrow and airless; a chap could hardly breathe in such a crowd of folk. And what a match it had been! For once he was sorry he had come. No score at all. Not a single goal on either side. Even a goal against the United would have been something, would have wakened them up a bit. The first half had been nothing but exasperation, with the United all round the Wanderers' goal but never able to score; centres clean flung away, open goals missed, crazy football. The second half had not been even that, nothing but aimless kicking about on both sides, a kids' game. During the time that it took him to progress three hundred yards down the crowded road, Mr. Oakroyd gave himself up to these bitter reflections. A little farther along, where there was more room, he was able to give them tongue, for he jostled an acquaintance, who turned round and recognized him.

"Na Jess!" said the acquaintance, taking an imitation calabash pipe out of his mouth and then winking mysteriously.

"Na Jim!" returned Mr. Oakroyd. This "Na," which must once have been "Now," is the recognized salutation in Bruddersford, and the fact that it sounds more like a word of caution than a word of greeting is by no means surprising. You have to be careful in Bruddersford.

"Well," said Jim, falling into step, "what did you think on 'em?"

"Think on 'em!" Mr. Oakroyd made a number of noises with his tongue to show what he thought of them.

"Ah thowt t'United'd 'a' made rings rahnd 'em," Jim remarked.

"So they owt to 'a' done," said Mr. Oakroyd, with great bitterness "And so they would 'a' done if they'd nobbut tried a bit. I've seen 'em better ner this when they've lost. They were better ner this when they lost to Newcastle t'other week, better bi far."

"Ay, a seet better," said the other. "Did you ivver see sich a match! Ah'd as soon go and see t'schooil lads at it. A shilling fair thrawn away, ah call it." And for a moment he brooded over his lost shilling. Then, suddenly changing his tone and becoming very aggressive, he went on: "Yon new centre-forrard they've getton—MacDermott, or whativver he calls hissen—he'll nivver be owt, nivver. He wer like a great lass on t'job. And what did they pay for him? Wer it two thahsand pahnd?"

"Ay." Mr. Oakroyd made this monosyllable very expressive.

"Two thahsand pahnd. That's abaht a hundred for ivvery goal he missed today. Watson were worth twenty on 'im—ah liked that lad, and if they'd let him alone, he'd 'a' done summat for 'em. And then they go and get this MacDermott and pay two thahsand pahnd for him to kick t'ball ower top!" Jim lit his yellow monster of a pipe and puffed away with an air of great satisfaction. He had obviously found a topic that would carry him comfortably through that evening, in the taproom of *The Hare and Hounds,* the next morning, in the East Bruddersford Working Men's Club, and possibly Sunday, Monday and Tuesday nights.

Mr. Oakroyd walked on in silence, quickening his pace now that the crowd was not so thick and there was room to move. At the corner of Manchester Road and Shuttle Street, both men halted, for here their paths diverged.

"Ah'll tell tha what it is, Jess," said his companion, pointing the stem of his pipe and becoming broader in his Yorkshire as he grew more philosophical. "If t'United had less brass to lake wi', they'd lake better fooitball." His eyes searched the past for a moment, looking for the team that had less money and had played better football. "Tha can remember when t'club had nivver set eyes on two thahsand pahnds, when t'job lot wor not worth two thahsand pahnds, pavilion an' all, and what sort o' fooitball did they lake then? We knaw, don't we? They could gi' thee summat worth watching then. Nah, it's all nowt, like t'ale an' baccy they ask so mich for—money fair thrawn away, ah calls it. Well, we mun 'a' wer teas and get ower it. Behave thi-sen, Jess!" And he turned away, for that final word of caution was only one of Bruddersford's familiar good-byes.

"Ay," replied Mr. Oakroyd dispiritedly. "So long, Jim!"

He climbed to the upper deck of a tram that would carry him through the centre of the town to within a few hundred yards of Ogden Street. There he sat, his little briar pipe, unlit and indeed empty, stuck in the corner of his mouth, his cap still pushed back from his glistening forehead, staring out of a disenchantment. At times the tram jerked him forward, but only to return him, with a bang, against the hard back of the seat. People who were larger than usual, and all parcels and elbows, pushed past or trod on his toes. It is no joke taking a tram on Saturday in Bruddersford.

"I call this two-pennorth o' misery, missis," he said to a very large woman who wedged herself into the seat beside him. She turned a damp scarlet face, and he saw that it was Mrs. Buttershaw, whose husband kept the little shop in Woolgate. Everybody in that district knew Buttershaw's, for it was no ordinary shop. It catered to both body and soul, one half of it being given up to tripe and cow-heels and the other half to music, chiefly sixpenny songs and cheap gramophone records. Strangers frequently stopped in front of Buttershaw's to stare and laugh, but strangers are easily amused: all the people round about recognised that this was a sensible arrangement, for some wanted tripe, some wanted music, and not a few wanted both.

"Eh, well, if it isn't Mr. Oakroyd!" Mrs. Buttershaw knew him as both a patron (of the tripe counter) and an old neighbour. "I didn't see yer. And 'ow are yer?"

"Middlin', middlin'," said Mr. Oakroyd, with the air of one determined to give nothing away.

"I've been meaning to ask yer for a long time," she went on, "only I haven't seen yer—'ow's your Lily doin' in where's it?—Ameriky?"

"Canada," Mr. Oakroyd announced promptly and rather proudly.

"Canada—that's it. It's all the same, isn't it? Only some calls it one thing, and some calls it another. Well, 'ow's she getting on there? Eh, it doesn't seem more than a week or two since she was a bit of a lass coming in for a pantymine song—she liked a bit o' music, didn't she? —and now she's a married woman in Canada."

"She's doing all right," said Mr. Oakroyd, vainly trying to appear unconcerned. "I'd a letter t'other day." But he did not add that that letter, which began "My dear Father and Mother, I write these few lines to let you know we are alright as I hope you are," was reposing in his coat pocket, having been carried there—and brought out and re-read at frequent intervals—these last three days.

"She's settled in, 'as she?" said Mrs. Buttershaw, who apparently thought of Canada as a sort of house.

"Ay. She's settling nicely, is Lily. Been there nearly a year."

"Eh, fancy that! A year! Well, I never did!" Mrs. Buttershaw seemed to have these exclamations shaken out of her by the jerky movements of the tram. "Who was it she married? I owt to know, but I've fergotten. I shall ferget me own name soon, I'm that bad at remembering."

"Jack Clough, old Sammy's youngest lad," replied Mr. Oakroyd. "He were a fitter at Sharp's."

"Eh, of course!" she exclaimed triumphantly. "I knew 'im well. He were often in, buying a bit of a comic song and suchlike. He were a nice lad, an' a lively card. But then your Lily was a lively lass, ful o' fun."

"Ay, lively enough. You knew when she was abaht." Mr. Oakroyd tried to speak off-handedly, but his voice warmed and his eyes were alight with affectionate reminiscence. He had always adored this only daughter of his. She had been the funniest baby, the cleverest child, and the prettiest girl in that part of Bruddersford, or, for that matter, in any other part. There was something wonderful about everything she did and said. Even her naughtiness—and she had always had a will of her own—had seemed to him only a special sort of fun and prettiness, as good as a play.

"Yer must miss 'er. I know I do meself. Even Joe was asking me about 'er t'other day. 'E didn't know she'd got married and gone away, 'e knows nowt, doesn't Joe; 'e's always a year or two be'ind'and." But she said this in such a way as to hint that Mr. Buttershaw, with one eye on his tripe and the other on his music, was rather above this business of knowing things, an absent-minded genius. "Ther wasn't a nicer little lass came into t'shop, and yer can put that feather in yer cap."

Mr. Oakroyd was so shaken out of his reserve by this praise that he proclaimed very earnestly: "Ay, I miss her all right. I didn't know ah could miss anybody so much. Place fair seems empty like sometimes."

For a minute or two nothing more was said. No doubt both of them felt that this last speech had reached the limits to which confession might be pushed. Beyond were extravagance and indecency, and a good Bruddersfordian left such wild regions to actors and Londoners and suchlike. Mr. Oakroyd looked out of the window.

The day was just crossing the little magical bridge between afternoon and evening. The early autumn sunlight was bent on working a miracle. A moment of transformation had arrived. It hushed and gilded the moors above, and then, just when Mr. Oakroyd's tram reached the centre of the town, passing on one side the Central Free Library and on the other the Universal Sixpenny Bazaar, it touched Bruddersford. All the spaces of the town were filled with smoky gold. Holmes and Hadley's emporium, the Midland Railway Station, the Wool Exchange, Barclay's Bank, the Imperial Music Hall, all shone like palaces. Smithson Square was like some quivering Western sea, and the Right Honourable Ebenezer Smithson himself, his marble scroll now a map of the Indies, was conjured into an Elizabethan admiral. The façades of Market Street towered strangely and spread a wealth of carven stone before the sun. Town Hall Square was a vast place of golden light; and its famous clock, as it moved to celebrate the enchanted moments, gave a great whirr and then shook down into the streets its more rapturous chimes, *The Lass of Richmond Hill.*

To all this sudden magic, Mr. Oakroyd, sucking at his empty pipe and staring through the window, might have seemed entirely unresponsive. He was not, however. One hand went fumbling up his shabby coat. It would have gone further, would have plunged into the inner pocket, if its owner had not been sharing a seat with Mrs. Buttershaw, who was of a breadth beyond the dreams of the Tramways Department. But if the hand could not bring out a letter, it could feel that it was there, and having done so, it dropped, satisfied.

"And 'ow," said Mrs. Buttershaw, looking with disapproval at the warehouse of Messrs. Hoggleby, Sons and Co., Ltd., in whose shadow they were, "is that lad of yours gettin' on?"

Mr. Oakroyd's face immediately changed, putting on a grim and satirical expression. "I can't say. He tells me nowt. I think he'll be all right as long as there's still a good supply o' brilliantine an' fancy socks, and plenty o' young women wi' nowt to do but look for chaps." Leonard might be the darling of his mother's heart, as indeed he was, but it was clear that his father had no great opinion of him.

Neither, it appeared, had Mrs. Buttershaw. "I seen 'im o' Wednesday," she said severely, "standing outside a picture place—I think it were t'Plazzer—and yer'd have thought 'e owned it. 'That's Mr. Oakroyd's lad,' I ses to Joe, but Joe didn't know him. Joe knows nobody, and bin in a shop for thirty year! Nay, I nivver seen such a man. 'Yer won't know me next,' I tell him. But when I showed 'im your lad, Joe ses 'Well, if that's Jess Oakroyd's lad, 'e's nowt like his father. 'E looks a bit of a swankpot.' 'Nay, Joe,' I ses, 'yer know nowt about t'lad.' But I knew what 'e meant. 'E doesn't like to see these lads all toffed up, doesn't Joe. Where's your Leonard workin' now? Is 'e still in t haircutting?"

"Ay, he's still at Bobsfill's i' Woolgate," said Mr. Oakroyd, who did not seem to resent these remarks.

"Well," said Mrs. Buttershaw, gathering together her assortment of packages and her immense form, " 'e'll nivver get fat on what old Bobsfill gives 'im. I nivver reckoned nowt o' barbers, and Bobsfill's one o' t' meanest. 'E'd go blind lookin' for a thripenny bit." And she heaved herself out of the seat and, as the tram slowed up, went waddling down he aisle.

Mr. Oakroyd, beginning to expand again into what he felt to be his natural size, fell to thinking of his daughter and her letter. As soon s Lily had gone, 51, Ogden Street had suddenly shrunk and darkened, nd there was no family life in it, no real home, only the three of them here, eating and sleeping and sometimes squabbling, with Leonard and his doting mother on one side and him on the other. "Don't you have t, Dad. Don't you put up with it. You look after yourself," Lily had whispered, just before she went, breaking up an old and happy alliance. Since then he had had a certain mournful pleasure in not putting up with it, in trying to look after himself. But it was a poor sort of business now.

He took the letter out of his pocket, but did not read it again. He had secretly hoped it would contain an invitation to him to go out there. He was ready to go at a word. A handy man like him could easily get work there. Six months' full time at the mill would easily raise he passage money. But no invitation had come, not a word about it. He hoped she had thought of it, had suggested it, and that it was only because Jack Clough, who was a decent young chap but, like the rest, bent on looking after Number One, had put his foot down that she had never said anything. He had mentioned it once or twice when he had written, just making a sort of little joke of it—"What would your old Father look like in Canada!"—and he did not feel like doing more than hat. They had their own way to make, and a baby was coming. He ooked down at the letter and then slowly tore it up and slipped the ragments under the seat.

The tram had ground its way to the Black Swan Inn (known locally s "t'Mucky Duck"), and this was his stop. He walked, rather slowly nd heavily, the few hundred yards that brought him to Ogden Street.

Nobody could consider Ogden Street very attractive; it was very long nd very drab, and contained two rows of singularly ugly black little houses; yet Ogden Street had its boasts, and its residents could claim to have both feet on the social ladder. You could, in fact, have a "come-down" from Ogden Street, and there were some people who even saw t as a symbol of a prosperity long vanished. To begin with, it was a respectable street, not one of those in which you heard sudden scream in the night or the sound of police whistles. Then too, it was entirel composed of proper houses, all with doors opening on to the street; an in this respect it was unlike its neighbours at the back, Velvet Stree and Merino Street, which had nothing but "passage" or "back-to-back houses, the product of an ingenious architectural scheme that cramme four dwelling-places into the space of two and enabled some past cit zens to drive a carriage-and-pair and take their wives and daughters t the Paris Exhibition in 1867. When you lived in Ogden Street, you di not disdain to talk to the occupants of "passage houses," but neverth less, if you were a woman who knew how to enjoy yourself, you coul afford to be sympathetic towards a humble passage-houser or put presumptuous one in her place. Many of these things had been know to Mr. Oakroyd, an old resident, for many years, but he did not ente tain himself now with any recollection of them.

The door, which led directly into the single living-room, stood aja There was no one in the room, but voices were coming from upstair Somebody shouted "Hello!" as he flung his cap down on the end o the shiny black sofa. He grunted a reply, went through to the sculler where he hastily washed, returning, with eyes still smarting from th yellow soap, to look very dubiously at the table. What he saw made hi shake his head. It was indeed the miserable ruin of a Saturday te Three dirty cups, pushed to one end of the table, announced that ther had been earlier arrivals, and everything had the air of having bee closely examined and then rejected. There were two pieces of brea and-butter on one plate, half a buttered currant teacake and a squashe lemon-cheese tart on another; and on a third—for the tasty bit, th glory of the meal—were the mere remains, the washy flotsam an jetsam, of a tin of salmon. Mr. Oakroyd poked about with a fork i this pink mush, shook his head again, and made little clucking noise Then he lifted the teapot from the fender, where it had been stewin its contents for some time, sat him down and summoned what was le of a rapidly vanishing appetite.

"You're back, are you!" This was Mrs. Oakroyd, who had com downstairs. She was a thin woman, with gleaming eyes, promine cheek-bones, a pinched nose reddened at the tip, and a long prow of hin. She had two passions, one for her son, Leonard, and the other or virtuous discomfort. "I'm house-proud" she reported of herself; and she could fill the living-room with steaming clothes a few minutes efore her husband arrived home from work, she was happy. She had ong regarded him neither as a friend nor as a partner but as a nuisance, omebody who was always coming in to upset the house, always demanding food and drink.

The nuisance gave her one quick glance, and saw at once that she was pleased about something, though ready at any moment to be quarrelsome about it. "Leonard's in this," he told himself, gave a nod, then loomily poured some of the salmon on to his plate.

"We 'ad our teas," remarked Mrs. Oakroyd, coming forward into the oom.

"Ay, so I see," returned her husband drily. "I wish I'd been here. Ther seems to ha' been a bit of a party like."

"Leonard's 'ere, come home this afternoon and brought Albert Tugridge with 'im, so we all 'ad our teas together."

"Oh, Leonard's here, is he?" Mr. Oakroyd stared rather aggressively t his wife. "And what's Leonard doing here at this time o' day? I uppose nobody i' Woolgate district wants a shave now o' Saturday." As this was the only day on which many Woolgate residents ever did want a shave, this remark was the grimmest irony.

There was an added gleam in his wife's eyes. "Leonard's done wi' Woolgate. Left this morning. *And* not afore 'e told old Bobsfill a thing or two either. Trust 'im," she added proudly.

Mr. Oakroyd laid down his knife and fork. "Gotten t'sack, has he, or marched out? And what's he going to do now? I call that daft. Lad's got too big for his boots."

The gleam was really triumphant now. She raised her voice: "I'll ell yer what he's going to do. He's going to work at Gregson's. There's a chap finishing there today, and our Leonard takes his place o' Monday. Gets two pound and what he makes, and you know what Gregson's is. Now then, what 'ave you got to say to that?"

He had nothing to say to it. He did know what Gregson's was, hough he had never been a patron of such a lordly establishment. Gregson's City Toilet Rooms were in the centre of the town, not two hundred yards from Town Hall Square, and heads worth a mint money were continually being trimmed there. It was impossible say a word against Gregson's.

"Two pounds and tips galore!" cried Mrs. Oakroyd. "It'll be fo pound ten, sometimes five pound, 'e tells me, in a good week, wi' reg lar customers coming in, wool men and travellers and suchlike. 'We I tells him, 'if it is, it's better money than your poor father ever broug home, and you only fower-and-twenty.' Nay, I were that surpris When I seen 'im walk in wi' Albert Tuggridge, middle o' t' afterno you could ha' knocked me down wi' a feather——"

"Ay," her husband put in, "an' when I see the way they'd both walk into that salmon, you could 'a' knocked me down wi' t'same feathe

"Go on, go on! That's right! Go on!" she cried, with the shrill irony. "Next time t' lad gets a better job I'll turn 'im and 'is friend o without a bit o' tea. I'll tell him 'e can't 'ave any, tell him it's all f his father. You've got as much there as we 'ad. What you want's caffy. What we sit down to isn't good enough for a man as can affo a shilling every week for a football match. He ought to 'ave 'am a eggs every night, he ought, steaks and chips every night, he oug when he's so well off——"

"All right, all right, all right," growled Mr. Oakroyd, and tried look like a man who had had enough of that nonsense. His wife ga a sniff, collected some dirty cups and plates, gave another sniff, th marched the things into the scullery, where she contrived to make extraordinary clatter. Mr. Oakroyd let his features relapse into th ordinary appearance, loudly yet mournfully sucked at a hollow toot then took an immense bite of currant teacake and washed it down wi a gulp of tea.

"I'll bet t'young women o' Bruddersford will find it hard to ke their heads screwed on tonight," he observed, when his wife returne He nodded towards the stairs. "Is that Albert Tuggridge up there no wi' Leonard?"

"Yes. Leonard's getting ready to go out. They're off to a social a dance at Shuttle Street Rooms."

Mr. Oakroyd smiled grimly. "I thought as much. There'll be so 'earts broken i' Shuttle Street tonight. It's fair cruel to let them tw ose on t'same night, and a Saturday an' all. It don't give lasses a ance. Them as doesn't prostrate therselves afore Leonard 'ull fall ore the all-conquering Albert. It's an absolute walk-over for the male x."

His wife bristled. "A body'ud think you'd never been young, Jess akroyd, the way you go on about them lads."

"Nay, I've been young. None so old yet, I'm thinking. But I were ever so dam' soft as yon two. Lady-killers, I calls 'em—Shuttle Street eart-breakers! Tut-t-t-t!"

It was not a bad description of Leonard and his friend, Albert. With em and their like was perishing, miserably and obscurely, an old tradion. Though they did not know it, they were in truth the last of a ng line, the last of the Marcaronis, the Dandies, the Swells, the Mashers, e Knuts. Their old home, the West End, knows these figures no nger; their canes and yellow gloves, their pearl-buttoned fawn overats, their brilliantine and scent and bouquets, their music-hall promeades and their hansoms, their ladies, with elaborate golden coiffures, ll busts, and naughty frills, all have gone, all went floating to limbo, ng ago, on their last tide of champagne; and some foolish and almost rgotten song, in perky six-eight time, of "Boys and Girls Upon the pree, In Peek-a-deely or Le-hester Squer-hare," is their requiem. But st as a tide of fashion, raging fiercely in Mayfair for a season, will go lling on and on, depositing black vases or orange cushions in drawingooms more and more remote year after year, so too the tradition of andyism and lady-killing, after it had forsaken its old home, lingered n in towns like Bruddersford and among such young men as Leonard nd Albert. They lived for dress and girls, above all—not having the pportunities of a Brummell—for girls. They ogled and pursued and mbraced girls at the Bruddersford dances and socials, in all the local arks and woods, picture theatres and music halls; they followed them n the Bridlington sands, along the Morecambe piers, into the Blackool ballrooms, and even went as far as Douglas, I. O. M., to treat them o eighteen-penny glasses of champagne and other notorious aphroisiacs; they knew, and frequently discussed among themselves, the recise difference between the factory girls of Bruddersford and the actory girls of Bradford or Huddersfield, between the tailoresses of

Leeds and the shop-girls of Manchester; they were masters of the of "picking up" and, young as they were, already veteran strategi in the war against feminine chastity or prudence, and were untiring the chase, tracking these bright creatures for weeks through the da jungle of West Riding streets, but apt to be either bored or frighten by the kill. In the end, most of them—as they said—"got caught," a were to be seen walking out of their old lives, those epics of gallant pushing a perambulator.

The two young men now descended the stairs. Leonard walked first, still patting his purple silk tie. He is a thin youth, with a ve elaborate and greasy arrangement of curls and waves in his hair, hardening eye and a loosening mouth, and an unfortunate habit becoming spotty about the forehead. His friend, Albert, clerk to Sw lans, the noisiest and shadiest auctioneer in the town, is larger a louder, and likes to brighten all social occasions by imitating the pub manner of his master. Having no family in Bruddersford, he lives lodgings a few streets away, where he says he is very uncomfortabl Already it has been suggested several times, both by Leonard and h mother, that Albert might lodge with them, but Mr. Oakroyd, wh does not want a lodger and especially does not want to see any more Albert, rages at the mere hint of such a proceeding.

"My words, Leonard," cried Mrs. Oakroyd, wiping her hands at th scullery door, "you're a swell tonight all right!" To see him standin there, in his new chocolate-coloured suit, with his purple socks and t and handkerchief, was as good as an evening out to her, better tha the pictures.

"Not so dusty, Mar," said Leonard, tapping a cigarette against the bac of his hand.

"Well, well, well, well!" shouted Albert, winking at Mr. Oakroy who was pushing his chair back. "'Ere we are, 'ere we are! All mer and bright, the old firm! And 'ow many runs did the old United mak today?" And he winked at everybody.

Mr. Oakroyd, who wanted to kick him, bent over his pipe and hi packet of *Old Salt* tobacco, and grunted: "Drew. Nil, nil."

"Not much for a bob there then, what do you say, Len?" Albe nt to the hearth and straddled there. “The poor old United will ’ave do better before they see my money.”

‘Rorther, rorther!” said Leonard, who was fond of entertaining com-ny at times with an imitation of a musical-comedy duke. This was e of the times.

‘Quaite, quaite!” roared Albert, who knew his cue.

Mr. Oakroyd, with the air of a man who had heard all this too many nes already, very deliberately lit his pipe, then relieved his feelings by owing out a cloud of smoke. “Well, they’ll ’a’ to try and get on thout your money, Albert,” he remarked, relishing his irony. “They’ll to manage somehow, though it’ll be a bad lookout for ’em, I can see at. Ha’ you told ’em yet, or are you letting ’em find it out for ther-lves?”

At this moment Mrs. Oakroyd and Leonard disappeared into the ullery, where they could be heard whispering. Albert cocked an ear that direction and then opened fire himself. “You’ve ’eard the news? en’s new job. Good biz, good biz! Got a rise meself last week. ood biz! We’re making money, making money. What d’you say?”

It was plain that Mr. Oakroyd had very little to say and that it was ot a subject that inspired him. He took out his pipe, looked at it and en looked at Albert, and asked very quietly if Mr. Swullans had sold ny more mahogany wardrobes lately. This was a malicious question ecause Mr. Swullans had once got into trouble and a half-column report the *Bruddersford Evening Express* because he sold a certain mahog-ny wardrobe.

But Albert was not abashed. “Now then, now then! We all know out that. Tricks in all trades! Did you know I was looking for esh digs?”

“Ay, I heard summat about it.”

“Well then, what d’you say to having this little drop o’ sunshine in the ld ’ome? What d’you think of that? Good company and a good ayer, right on the nail every Friday night.”

Mr. Oakroyd shook his head. “It won’t wash, lad.”

“Right on the nail every Friday,” Albert repeated with gusto. “And ll the family in favour.”

"It won't wash. We don't want no lodgers 'ere. There's plenty takes 'em without us. We don't want 'em."

"Oh, we don't, don't we!" This was from Mrs. Oakroyd, standin belligerent, in the scullery doorway.

Her husband gave a steady look, then raised his voice. "No, don't."

"Well, some of us thinks we do."

"Then you mun think again, and think different," said Mr. Oakroy with an air of finality. And before any of them could reply, he h taken his cap from the end of the sofa, clapped it on his head and walk out.

He told himself that he wanted a little stroll, another ounce of *O* *Salt,* an early edition of the *Evening Express Sports.* But he knew was afraid of what was coming. Having fired, manfully, his one b gun, he felt compelled to retreat. All the way down Ogden Street, kept repeating to himself, "Better money than your poor father ev brought home"; and didn't like the look of things at all.

III

The week-end had begun badly for Mr. Oakroyd, and it did n improve. The depression of Saturday afternoon could not be shak off. He could think of nothing to look forward to. He was troubl by a vague foreboding. It was just as if a demoniac black dog we trotting everywhere at his heels. Normally he was happy enough wh he was smoking a pipe or two of *Old Salt* over the *Evening Expre* *Sports,* learning how "Kelly pushed the ball out to the homesters' le wing and Macdonald shot hard from a fine centre, but the visitin custodian made a great clearance." But this Saturday night he coul not settle down to the welcome pink sheets. It followed him, this bla dog, when he tried another stroll later, into the centre of the town, an it even found its way with him into the singing-room of *The Boy an* *Barrel,* where he had a half-pint of bitter and listened to a purple-face tenor, the victim of two passions, one for Doreen, His Darling and H Queen, and the other for Home, Just a Tumble-down Cottage. N had it departed when he called, on his return home, at Thwaites' Fis and Chip Shop (it called itself the West End Supper Bar, but nobod ok any notice of that), and ate three-pennorth o' chips and a tail hile exchanging some remarks on t'United with Sam Thwaites, that xcellent critic of the game.

Sunday morning was no better. To begin with, there was a bit of n argument about Albert Tuggridge at breakfast. Then the *Imperial ews,* with which, like two million other Britons, he spent Sunday orning, for once gave him no pleasure. Listlessly he turned from *ecrets of European Courts* to *Dope Dens of Mayfair,* from *What the usband Saw* to *Scandals of the Boxing Ring,* and the most startling evelations, the most terrible disclosures, failed to brighten his eye. At alf-past eleven he went to the Woolgate Working Men's Club and sat ere over a half-pint, only to learn, to his disgust, that young Maundery ad been made secretary of the local branch of his Trade Union, the extile, Waggon and Warehouse Workers. Mr. Oakroyd had not been n good terms with his Union for some time, and this appointment of aundery, a hatchet-faced young fanatic who had an unqualified dmiration of Russian methods, meant that very soon he would be on ven worse terms. He disliked the chap, and only a fortnight ago, in is very club, they had had a long and loud argument, during which r. Oakroyd had horrified his opponent by calling "proletariat"—a rm that Maundery used in every other sentence and regarded as sacred —"a bloody daft word." After that cheerless half-pint, he went home a dinner that was a sulky silent affair and none too good. This was hat he had expected. He knew he had now seen the last of his wife's est efforts in cookery for some time. In the afternoon, he dozed neasily for an hour or so, suddenly decided to walk to the park, found e had gone far enough when only half-way there, and came back, usty and gloomy, to a solitary tea. Leonard had gone off for the day, nd Mrs. Oakroyd was taking tea with some fellow-worshipper at the oolgate Congregational Chapel. Mr. Oakroyd ate and drank a good eal in an absent-minded fashion, then smoked two pipes of *Old Salt* hile he gave himself to a mournful survey of this life.

It was nearly seven o'clock when he finally decided how to spend the vening. He would go and see his friend Sam Oglethorpe out at Wab- ey. Having arrived at this decision, he immediately felt more cheerful, or to go as far as Wabley, which is four miles out of Bruddersford and almost on the edge of the moors, was something to do, indeed qui a little adventure, and he knew that Sam would be in and ready t welcome him. What he did not know was that this was a most momentous decision, that here was not a little adventure but the beginning o all manner of great adventures, that the thread now dangling in th empty space of his life was almost within reach, that Destiny was har at work as he had his wash at the scullery sink, walked, took a tram walked again, out to Wabley.

Yes, Sam was in, and glad to see him, and together they went dow to the run and looked at hens. The two had worked side-by-side fo years in the waggon department of Higden and Co., but two or thre years ago they had parted company, for Sam had come into mone having been left four hundred pounds by an uncle who had kept a off-licence shop, and had boldly walked out of Higden's, never to retur He was now "on his own" at Wabley, the proud proprietor of a larg hen-run, a little cottage, and a sign that said "Joinery and Jobbing Wor Promptly Attended To." That was why Mr. Oakroyd regarded hi friend with admiration and envy, for he too would like to walk out o Higden's for the last time, to have done with wages and foremen an the tyrannical buzzer. Deep in his heart was a sign about Joinery an Jobbing Work. The hoisting of that sign, proclaiming Jes. Oakroyd the independent craftsman, to the world, was one of his constant dream And he was a better craftsman than Sam, too; give him a saw, a hammer, a few nails, and he could do anything. But Sam, assisted by th off-licence uncle, had managed to scramble out, while he was still in, i up to the neck, and lucky perhaps to be keeping on at Higden's at al

Now, the last hen dismissed, they were cosily talking over pipes an a jug of beer. They were not in Mr. Oglethorpe's cottage, which wa simply a place to eat and sleep in and not meant, as anybody in Wable would tell you, for social life. No, they were sitting snugly in M Oglethorpe's combined hen-house and workshop, with the jug of bee on a bench between them. If you want to know what independent me in Bruddersford and district think about life, you must listen to the tal that comes floating out of hen-houses at night. A man can afford to le himself go in a hen-house. Sam had been letting himself go, enlargin upon his plans and prospects, his hens, his Joinery, his Jobbing, to al f which Mr. Oakroyd had been listening with deep and admiring attenion. It was now time he had a look in, and Mr. Oglethorpe, like the ood fellow he was, knew it and gave him his cue.

“Ay,” said Mr. Oglethorpe, who had the slow meditative manner that roperly belongs to Jobbing Work, “that's what 'appens i' this sort o' usiness i' Wabley, ay, and i' Bruddersford too. Did you give it any tention, Jess, when you was down South? It'll be a bit diff'rent there, 'm thinking.”

Mr. Oakroyd's face lit up at once. This “down South” was the cue. This was where he came in and more than held his own, for if, in this ompany, Mr. Oglethorpe was the independent man, the owner of hens nd a sign, the craftsman at large, who could smoke his pipe when he ked, Mr. Oakroyd was the travelled man, who had knocked up and own a bit, who could talk of what were to Mr. Oglethorpe, who had ever been anywhere, foreign parts. It was only in the company of his riend Sam that Mr. Oakroyd felt that he really had seen the world. Ie had not often been away from Bruddersford, though he had had a ew little holidays at Morecambe, Blackpool, and Scarborough, had been n football trips to Manchester, Newcastle, Sheffield, and had once gone n a wonderful midnight excursion to London and had actually seen t. Paul's and London Bridge before he fell asleep in an eating-house; ut it happened that for a whole six months he had worked in Leicester, here his firm had a branch, and ever after he had referred to this xciting period as the time when he was “down South.” It was another f his dreams, companion to that of the hoisted sign, this happy business f travelling, of knocking about, of seeing this place and that, of telling ow you once went there and then moved on somewhere else, and lthough he knew he had seen nothing much yet and probably never ould now, yet he was able, nourished as he was by his secret dream, capture the manner of the true wanderer. During his six months in eicester, he had lodged in a street that could hardly be distinguished om his own Ogden Street, had worked in another Higden's mill that as just like the one in Bruddersford except that it was smaller and eaner. Yet when he said “down South,” he seemed to conjure up a ast journey towards the tropics and at the end of it a life entirely alien, ntastic.

"Ay, it's different there, Sam," said Mr. Oakroyd, puzzling his brain to discover some proof of this difference. "It's altogether different there it is."

" 'Old on a bit afore you tell me," the other cried, reaching for th jug. "There's another sup i' this for both of us, I'm thinking. Na then!" And he put a match to his pipe and looked across at his friend his honest red face aglow.

"Well, then, you see," began Mr. Oakroyd, but thought better of i and drank some beer instead. Then he reflected a moment. "Well what I'd say is this. Yer asking me how this sort o' trade, Joinery and Jobbing, 'ud go down South, aren't yer?"

"That's right, Jess." And Mr. Oglethorpe looked very profound a he said this.

"Well, what I'd say is this; that ther mayn't be so much of it down there but what ther is 'ud be a better class o' thing. D'you follow me Sam?"

Sam did follow him and looked more profound than ever as he slowly puffed at his short clay pipe. Nothing was said for a minute or two Then Mr. Oglethorpe proceeded to light a very old and evil-smelling paraffin lamp that hung from the roof, and when he had done this, h broke the silence. "It'll be all different, I'm thinking, Jess. I could nivver settle to it. But I'll bet tha liked it."

"I like a bit of a change, Sam."

"I'll bet tha'd like to be off down there ag'in next week," said Mr Oglethorpe, with an air of great artfulness, as if he had caught his friend at last.

"I might an' I might not," replied Mr. Oakroyd, who was not fo giving himself away at once, not even in Sam's hen-house. But then the hour and his mood worked together to fling down his reserve. H leaned forward and looked at once eager and wistful. "I'll tell you what it is, Sam. I'd give owt to see a bit more afore I'm too old."

"Yer've seen summat already, Jess," Mr. Oglethorpe spoke proudly as if his friendship gave him a share in these vast migrations.

"Nowt much when you look at it."

"Why, look at me," cried Mr. Oglethorpe. "I've nivver been farther ner Wetherby, to t'races there. Nay, I'm lying; I have. I once went fo day to Southport to see t'sea, but I nivver saw it, not a drop. It were take-in, that."

"I'd like to knock up an' down a bit," Mr. Oakroyd went on, "an' e what there is to see afore I'm too old an' daft. I've gotten fair sick Bruddersford lately, Sam, I have that. I'd like to get on t'move."

"Where d'yer want to go, Jess? Down South ag'in? What is't yer ant to see?"

"Nay, I don't know," said Mr. Oakroyd, gloomily. "I'd like to see mmat fresh. I'd like to have a look at—oh, I don't know—Bristol."

"Ar," said Mr. Oglethorpe knowingly. "Bristol."

"Or I'd like to see—yer know—some of them places—Bedfordshire," added, at a venture.

The other shook his head at this. "I nivver heard tell much o' that ace," he said gravely. "Is ther owt special i' Bedfordshire, Jess?"

"Nay, I don't know," replied Mr. Oakroyd, a trifle impatiently. "But s summat to see. I'd like to go and have a look so I'd know if ther is owt there or not. And I'll tell you another thing, Sam. I'd like to to Canada."

"Yer nivver would, yer nivver would, Jess!" Mr. Oglethorpe slapped s thigh in appreciation of this audacity. "An' if yer got there, yer'd ant to be back i' no time. Nowt to sup, they tell me, and snaw months d months on end. Plenty o' money, I dare say, but nowt to spend it . Nay, Jess, I'll nivver believe yer'd go as far as that."

"I've a lass o' mine there, Sam."

"Ay, so you have. I'd fergetten. But I'll tell yer what it is. Y'owt 'a' been a wool-buyer, Jess, and then yer could 'a' gone off all ower lace and been paid for it. It'ud 'a' suited thee down to t'ground."

"I dare say," said Mr. Oakroyd grimly. "An' I owt to have a motor- and twenty pound a week and nowt to do and plenty o' time to it in——"

At this moment a voice cried "Hello!" and a face appeared in the orway.

"Who's that? Oh, it's you, is it, Ted? Come in, lad, come in. Yer ow my nephew Ted, Jess?" And when Ted had sat himself down an old coop, Mr. Oglethorpe went on: "Now, here's a lad as can tell you a thing or two about knocking up and down. He's nivver at hom five minutes. Off wi' t'lorry all ower t' country, aren't yer, Ted?"

Ted, who was part owner of a lorry that called itself The Wabl Transport Co., admitted that he knocked about a bit and knew a thin or two.

"This lorrying owt to 'a' been your line o' business, Jess," Mr. Ogl thorpe continued, winking at his nephew for no particular reas "Where d'yer go next, lad?"

"Off tomorrow," replied Ted, a laconic youth who preferred to tal like a ventriloquist, with a cigarette in his mouth. "Load at Brudde ford. Merryweather's, Tapp Street. Going to Nuneaton. Shan't g off till late tomorrow night."

"What time, Ted?" asked his uncle, rather in the manner of coun in court, as if he already knew the answer himself.

"Ten or eleven. Perhaps twelve. Merryweather's got a rush o That's how we got the job. Travel all night. Deliver in the mornin Hell of a game." And Ted, having finished his speech, took out h cigarette to whistle.

"There y'are, Jess. 'Ell of a game," Mr. Oglethorpe repeated triu phantly.

"It 'ud do me," muttered Mr. Oakroyd.

"It 'ud suit 'im," said Mr. Oglethorpe, turning to his nephew. "Ye 'a' ter give 'im a job on t'lorry, Ted."

"Nothing doing," replied Ted. "Wouldn't thank us if we did. H can have a trip when he likes, of course. See for himself then. Nothi in it. Been all over, Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle, Leicester, Cove try, even taken it to London twice. Dozens o' smaller places. All ov Nothing in it. Get sick of it. Same old carry-on every time. Plac all alike when you come to know 'em."

"Nay, I'll be damned if they are," Mr. Oakroyd protested. "You m 'a' seen a sight more ner I have, but you must 'a' given it a funny s o' look to think that. Places is as different as chalk and cheese. I so picked that out when I were down South."

"Ay, that's right," Mr. Oglethorpe observed. "I've heard Jess 'e tell many a time 'ow diff'rent it is. I've seen nowt much, but yer c nivver tell me places is all alike. Why, ther's Wabley 'ere is as diff're s owt from all t'other small places round Bruddersford. Amazin' it is, air amazin'! Then Bruddersford's ner more like Leeds or Halifax an I'm like Billy Baxter."

"Who's Billy Baxter?" This was from Ted, who ought to have nown better.

"What! Nivver heard o' Billy Baxter!" cried Mr. Oglethorpe, in reat glee. "Well, well, well! Billy Baxter were the fellow that could ivver stand up without getting on his feet." And Mr. Oglethorpe began punch himself, and shake and splutter and cough, until at last he as purple and helpless.

"Tha hasn't selled that to anybody for years, Sam," said Mr. Oakroyd pprovingly. "Ted's learned summat tonight, anyway."

Ted, still with a cigarette in his mouth, was shaking his head and at e same time making a loud tut-tutting noise. He was not abashed— a man of the world, he could afford to ignore such primitive jests but he knew that his prestige was gone for the remainder of the eve-ng, and so, after giving his uncle a resounding slap or two on the back, took his leave.

Mr. Oakroyd stayed long enough to smoke another pipe, and was then ered through the darkness—for it was late now—by his host, who companied him as far as the tram terminus. The tram that was wait-g there, however, only took him to the outskirts of Bruddersford, ere it went groaning into its shed. Mr. Oakroyd would have to lk the rest of the way. As a rule he liked to go to bed early on Sun-y night, but now he was in no mood to consider Monday morning, re especially as he had just left the company of an independent crafts-n and a man of travel. The night was fine and he was not tired. f he went, with his old brown cap at the back of his head, whistling tly and watching his shadow that grew and then dwindled between street-lamp and the next. He was walking back into something t was beginning to look like slavery, but the large quiet night was , and a man might fancy himself anything, proprietor of a Joinery l Jobbing sign, owner of a lorry commanded to go to Bristol or Bed-dshire, even a chap going out to Canada to see his daughter, as he lked in peace through such a night.

Ie was now in the Merton Park district, Bruddersford's best suburb, where the wool merchants and the manufacturers and the bank managers had their detached villas. These pleasant avenues were full leafy shadows, for there were trees in the gardens and trees alternatin with the street-lamps on the pavement itself. Now and then he hear the distant sound of a piano. Two or three cars rolled past. Sometim from the deeper shadows there came a whispering and sound of kissin for lovers in Bruddersford favoured the Merton Park district. The were very few of them about now, however; it was too late. Learoy Avenue, longest and leafiest of these opulent roads, was very quiet. Y it was in Learoyd Avenue, nearly at the end, just before it turns in Park Drive, that Mr. Oakroyd's adventures really began.

He had just stepped from the lamplit pavement into the shadow of tree, when he tripped over something and went sprawling.

"What the bl——!" he began, startled and shaken.

"Shush! Shush!" said a voice, close to his ear. "Naughty! Naughty

Mr. Oakroyd scrambled to his feet and peered through the gloo at the figure beside him. "'Ere, Mister, get up."

The other giggled quietly. "Can't gerrup," he said. "Can't poshib gerrup."

"Well, you can't stay there all t'night, Mister," said Mr. Oakroy who now understood the situation. "Can you now?"

"I dunno, I dunno," said the other meditatively. "P'raps I can, p'ra I can't. Who knows?" Then in a tone of great melancholy he adde "Nobody knowsh. And nobody—nobody—caresh. Nobody." seemed to be overcome by the pathos of this reflection.

"Well, you've got a load on and no mistake," said Mr. Oakroy Then he reached out a hand. "Come on, come on. This'll nivver 'Oist yerself up."

"That's ri'. Gimme a hand, the hand of frien'ship. Up we go And, aided by Mr. Oakroyd, he struggled to his feet, clapped Mr. Oa royd on the shoulder, nearly lost his balance again, and finally clu to his companion's arm and began staggering down the road. T lamplight revealed him as a large red-faced man, very smart in a lig grey felt hat, check suit, and spats.

"You're a good fella," he cried. "A very good fella. And I—I'm good fella too. Both good fellas. Wass'r name? Mine's George. I' ad a mos' extr'or—extra'or'—'stonishin' time. Mos' 'stonishin'. Been way nearly a week. Racesh. Yes, I'm a rayshing man. Been to oncashter—all over. An' lucky ev'ry time, ev'ry ev'ry time. D'you now, d'you know"—and here George separated himself from his com- anion and stood swaying—"wha' I made thish week?" He waved a inger at Mr. Oakroyd, then repeated, quite sternly: "D'you know?"

"Nay, I don't know," replied Mr. Oakroyd, good-humouredly. "But 'll bet it were more ner I did."

"Well, I'll tell you," said George, gravely swaying. "I'll tell you. No, won't, 'cos I've forgorren. But hundredsh, hundredsh an' hundredsh. ucky, very very lucky. And now—here I am, here I am, my frien', ome again." And he steadied himself by grasping Mr. Oakroyd's arm gain.

"But where do you live, Mister?"

"Roun' the corner, roun' the corner. Had mosh 'stonishin' adventures, ese lash few days. Came back in car. With palsh, goo' old palsh. ut gone, all gone. We had li'l' dishpute. Fact is"—and he lowered s voice and almost rested his head on his companion's shoulder—act is, ol' man, they were drunk, yes, dr-r-unk. An' they dropped me t of the car. Bur I said to them, I says, 'I'm berrer without you 'cos u're all drunk and thish is reshpec—reshpec'able neighbererer-hood.' hash wor I says, my frien', an' I think you'll agree thar it was well oken—on my par'." These three last words came with a rush, for he d suddenly released his hold and had swung round alarmingly.

"Nay, that won't do, Mister," said Mr. Oakroyd, making a grab at m. "You'll nivver get home at that rate. Now where is it you live?"

"Jus' roun' the corner, roun' the good ol' Johnny Horner," replied orge, with enthusiasm. "We're all ri', we're all ri'. You're a good la. You been to racesh thish time?"

'No, I've not, nor nowhere else either for a long time. Hold up, ister, hold up."

But George had swung right over and was now slowly collapsing inst the railings. His legs slowly slid over the pavement, but he still t on talking. "You're a wise man, a wise wise man—to stay at me." And he said this several times as his head sank lower and ver.

"Nay, brace up, brace up!" Mr. Oakroyd tried to pull him up b the man was heavy and a dead-weight now. For a moment it look as if he were going to sleep, but Mr. Oakroyd gave him a series nudges and shakings and at last succeeded in arousing him a litt After he had made an effort, and Mr. Oakroyd had put out all strength to assist him, George rose very unsteadily to his feet and st gered one or two paces forward.

" 'Ere, what's this?" said Mr. Oakroyd, picking up an unusually bul pocket-book. "This must be yours." And he handed it over.

The other waved it in the air. "My note case. Full, full to the bri with money. Hundredsh of pounds, hundredsh. Must have dropped pocket." Then he came closer and held the pocket-book only about t inches from Mr. Oakroyd's nose. "I thank you. I thank you. Kn you were good fella. An honesh man. Come here," he added, ignori the fact that it would be impossible for his companion to be any clo than he already was. Indeed, he himself stepped back a pace as continued: "Come here. You gave me thish, I give you somethi Yes, I do. Fair's fair. Thash George's motto." He fumbled in t pocket-book. "Come here. Hold hand out."

Mr. Oakroyd found himself clasping some crisp pieces of paper. Th felt like banknotes, and there were four of them. He did not stop examine them but held them out to the donor, who was busying hims with the pocket-book. "Look here, Mister, I can't take these," he sa for his code demanded that he should help a drunken man if he possi could and also that he should not take advantage of a man's drunk freaks of generosity.

"Warrer say?" George was still busy fastening his pocket-book a putting it away.

"I say I can't take these," he repeated, almost pushing the notes in other's face.

"Warrer mean can't take 'em? I tell you, I give 'em. Li'l' pres for good boy."

"If I take these," said Mr. Oakroyd earnestly and somewhat unwis "you'll be sorry in the morning."

This offended George. "Warrer mean sorry in the morning?"

ried aggressively. "Money's mine, isn't it? Do warrer like with it, an't I? Can I or can't I? Ish it mine or ishn't it? Can I or can't I? nswer plain queshuns." And he brought his face as near as he could.

Mr. Oakroyd stepped back and began to feel impatient, but said othing.

"Come on, come on. Le'sh have answer plain queshuns. Can I or n't I? Have I gorrer ask you warrer do with it?"

"Oh, don't be such a damn fool, Mister," cried Mr. Oakroyd, tired of is daft catechism.

"Damn fool, eh? All ri', all ri'. Thash finish, ab-so-lutely finish." nd he made a sweeping gesture that nearly threw him off his feet. You go to hell now, anywhere. Finish. No frien' o' mine." He turned vay and staggered forward at a surprising pace.

Mr. Oakroyd, stuffing the notes in his pocket, hurried after him. Half-a-minute, half-a-minute," he cried to the swaying figure.

The indignant George stopped for a moment to shout: "You go to ll. I don't want you. Don't you follow me." And off he went again, und the corner into Park Drive. A few yards farther on, he stopped ain: "Don't you follow me. You're a bad fella, you are. You leave e alone." But Mr. Oakroyd only increased his pace and was almost to him, when a large figure stepped out of a shadowy gateway and nfronted the pair of them.

"'Ere, 'ere! What's all this about?" said the policeman, flashing his np on their faces.

George pulled himself up and saluted. "Good-evening, Conshtable. s' going home. You know me, don't you?"

The policeman took another look at him. "Yes, I think I know you, . You live down 'ere, don't you? Well, the sooner you're 'ome the ter, if you ask me. And what's all this noise about? Who's this ?"

"Thash the point," replied George gravely. "Who is he? I dunno o he is. I've jus' told him he's a bad fella, an' I don't want him lowing me. You tell him he's a bad fella."

The policeman flashed his lamp over Mr. Oakroyd again. "Now n, what's the game?"

"There's no game," said Mr. Oakroyd, rather sulkily. "I found hi rolling drunk up the road and gave him a hand, that's all."

"Rollin' drunk!" exclaimed George, horror-stricken. "You're a ba bad fella, an' I told you not to keep following me."

"You be off," said the policeman to Mr. Oakroyd, "and leave hi alone. And you get off home, sir, afore somebody else starts follerin you. You've not far to go."

"Ay, ay, Cap'en." And George gave another salute and zigzagg down the road. Mr. Oakroyd moved on after him, but a shout fro the policeman behind pulled him up.

"Didn't I tell you to be off?" cried the policeman, who had now caug up to him. "Get off and leave 'im alone afore you get into troubl

"He's not the only chap as is going home." Mr. Oakroyd was indi nant. "I've as much right to walk down this street as he has. I'm goi home too. I'm not going to bother with him. He's daft drunk."

"Where d'you live?"

"Ogden Street."

"That's a good way from 'ere," said the policeman suspiciously.

"Ay, but this is nearest way to it, and that's all I care about."

"Well, walk on the other side then. I shall stand 'ere and watch yo And don't let me see you round 'ere again tonight."

"I don't want ivver to set eyes on thee agen, lad," Mr. Oakroyd mu tered to himself as he crossed the road. He walked as fast as he cou now, and took the first possible turning out of Park Drive. "I won who that were," he said to himself. "Eh, I've seen some silly drun in my time, but I nivver saw one sillier." He had to slow down a lit because his heart, which had been given a bump or two by that unple ant talk with the policeman, kept missing a beat and seemed to ma him short of breath. Thus it was very late indeed when he fina arrived at 51, Ogden Street, and even Leonard was obviously in bed.

He found a piece of buttered currant teacake, took a large and co forting bite out of it, and then smoothed out on the table four five-pou notes. Twenty pounds. Only twice before had he ever possessed suc sum, and then it had been scraped together, shilling added to shilli But here was twenty pounds that had fallen to him out of the bl What should he do with it? He crept upstairs, pondering.

IV

An' serve 'im right, too," Mrs. Oakroyd muttered. "I haven't a bit of atience with him." It was the third time she had turned over this ipper, now blackened on both sides. It awaited, this kipper, the arrival Mr. Oakroyd from work, being indeed the usual centrepiece of Mon- ay evening's tea; but obviously it had long ceased to care whether he ame or not. An hour earlier this kipper might have been said to be asted on him. Now, as Mrs. Oakroyd has suggested, it could only be escribed as something that served him right. Mr. Oakroyd generally rived home before six, but now it was after seven. His wife, who had een washing all day and had organised a particularly fine display of eaming clothes round the fire at a quarter to six, had lost more and ore of her temper with every passing quarter of an hour. Had she nown that four five-pound notes had found their way into her hus- nd's pockets, late last night, she might have been alarmed. She knows othing, however, and has not exchanged a dozen words with her hus- nd, who has to rise very early and take both breakfast and dinner to e mill, since they disposed of the Sunday dinner. She is not alarmed ut simply annoyed. "A body can't get on," she tells herself fretfully. ery soon she will have to prepare tea for Leonard, who will return om his first day at Gregson's to find a kipper, and a much larger and tter kipper than the one we have already seen, waiting for him, done a turn. Meanwhile, his father, like the nuisance he is, must take it to his head—for that is how Mrs. Oakroyd saw the matter—to be over n hour late.

"Not 'ome yet!" she cried to Mrs. Sugden, who had looked in from ext door. "His tea's been ready nearly an hour and a half. Eh, men's bother, they are! Is yours 'ome?"

"Long sin'," said Mrs. Sugden, a woman of few illusions. "Been nd gone out again. Trust 'im! When 'e's more ner an half-hour te, I know I shan't see 'im afore all pubs an' clubs is closed. But that vver happens o' Monday 'cos 'e has nowt. They can't be working er at Higden's, can they?"

"Not they!" Mrs. Oakroyd knew all about the state of the wool trade.

"They can't get a full week in, and a lot on 'em's been stopped. It not that, I'm sure. Some piece o' silliness, I'll be bound."

"'E's 'ere," Mrs. Sugden whispered dramatically, then promptly var ished from the doorway.

The next moment he *was* there, a grimy, hot and angry man wh flung his cap and his bag of joiner's tools down on the sofa, then clos the outer door with a bang.

"Where in the name o' goodness have you been?" his wife demande "And your tea waiting 'ere a full hour and a half!"

"Been on to t'Union office," he answered shortly.

She glanced at his face and then moderated her tone. "What d'y want to go there for at this time?"

"'Cos I've been stopped." He bent down and began to unlace h heavy working boots.

"You've been what?" his wife shrieked.

"Stopped, sacked, paid off, whativver you want to call it!" H straightened himself and threw an insurance card and some money the table. "I'm not even under notice. Higden's has finished wi' m and I've finished wi' them. There's a week's money there." He beg to unlace the other boot.

"Well, I nivver did!" cried Mrs. Oakroyd. She flopped down into chair and regarded him with the utmost astonishment. "What 'a' y been doing?"

"I'll tell you all about it in a minute. I want a wash and summat eat." He marched in his stockinged feet towards the scullery. "G my tea ready and then you'll soon know what I've been doing," added grimly.

In Bruddersford wives do not stand on ceremony at such moments crisis, and Mrs. Oakroyd, without a word of protest, made the tea a released the kipper from its long ordeal.

"If this 'ere fish had 'a' been by t'fire a minute longer," said M Oakroyd, now seated at the table, "it 'ud 'ave started warping. I like a bit o' burnt wood."

"Happen it's last you'll see for a bit," his wife retorted, having be roused by this gratuitous sally. "Never mind about that. What 'a you gotten stopped for?"

"For nowt, just nowt," he began. "Or, if you like, for bein' a man nd not a damned monkey." He stopped to take a drink of tea, then, ointing his fork at Mrs. Oakroyd, he resumed: "This morning I hadn't waggon in, and so were doin' nowt for a bit. Simpson, t'under-manger, comes up an' ses, 'What are you on with, Oakroyd?' and I tells im, 'Nowt, just now.' They're puttin' up a temporary shed for waggons, and so Simpson ses 'Well, help wi' t'shed. You can start y getting this into shape.' And he points to a beam they pulled out t'old shed, and he finds measurements for me. So I borrows an axe n' a big cross-cut saw and gets to work on this 'ere beam. I haven't een at it more ner ten minutes when a chap taps me on t'back. I don't now him but I know he's one o' t'shop-stewards. 'An' when did you in t'Carpenters' Union, comrade?' he ses, very nasty. 'What d'you ean?' I ses, though I knew what was coming. He pointed to t'beam: 'hat's a carpenter's job,' he ses, 'an' you keep off it, comrade.' I give m a look. 'Comrade!' I ses, 'My God!' 'I've noticed you once or ice,' he ses, 'an' it's struck me you've got the makings of a blackleg,' ses. 'An summat else'll strike you in a minute, mate, if you stay here llin' me names,' I ses. 'Well, leave that job alone,' he ses, an' walks f. And of course I had to."

He paused for refreshment, and his wife stared at him and said that e didn't know whatever things were coming to.

"Well, let me finish," said Mr. Oakroyd, as if she had been preventing n. "So I'd nowt to do again. By an' by, Simpson comes round again, is time wi' manager hisself, old Thorley. They're takking a quick ok round and seem a bit flustered. Thorley sees me. 'What's this an doing?' he asks. 'Eh, Oakroyd,' Simpson shouts across, 'get on wi' at job an' sharp about it.' 'I can't get on wi' it,' I shouts back, and oves across to tell 'em. 'Go on, man, go on, man, go on!' ses old horley, waving his hand at me, and out they goes. At dinner-time I ars that the great man hisself, Sir Joseph Higden, Bart.—an' his father ere nobbut a weaving overlooker like mine—is on the premises. I ew now why t'managers were so flustered. 'I'll bet they're cuttin' mmat down,' I ses. About three o'clock they lands in our department, Joseph and Thorley, wi' Simpson behind. I see Sir Joseph wave his nd. Then Thorley looks round, an' I see him look at me and then say

summat to Simpson. In a minute or two, Simpson comes up an' s
'I'm sorry, Oakroyd, but you'll 'a' to take a week's notice.' 'What for
I ses. 'What have I done?' 'It's your own fault,' he ses, 'there's so ma
to be stopped, an' you shouldn't have let Mr. Thorley see you this mor
ing.' 'It were no fault o' mine,' I ses, 'an' I'm going to have a word w
Mr. Thorley.' And I did have a word wi' him, an' a fat lot o' good
did me. I begins to tell him how long I'd been there, an' he cuts m
short an' ses some of us older men is as idle as young uns instead
setting an example. That were enough for me, and I ses summat
shouldn't ha' said. 'Pay 'im off an' give him his card,' he ses. 'Th
man's finished wi' Higden's for good an' all.' "

"That comes o' not keeping a civil tongue in your head, Jess Oakroyd
said his wife reproachfully. "I've warned you afore now."

"What d'you think I'm made of?" demanded Mr. Oakroyd. "Wh
a chap's called a blackleg in t'morning an' an idler i' t'afternoon, h
got to say summat. Well, I gets my week's money and my card at fi
o'clock, and sets off for t'Union office to tell my tale there. Secretary
not in. That's young Maundery, him as talks so much about t
proletariat. I waits about and waits about. By and by in he comes, a
who's with him? That shop-steward, the comrade. In they com
laughing and talking, two bloody comrades together. A fat lot o' go
my trying to tell 'em my tale! Started pulling me up right an' le
'Notify' this, that an' t'other. 'Oh, you go to Hell,' I ses at finish. Wh
wi' one an' another, and being badgered this way an' that, I hadn't
bit o' patience left. 'Oh, you go to Hell,' I ses, and marches out. An
now you know."

His wife sat there rigid, her eyes fixed on his. For a few momen
her face softened and she looked as if she were about to cry. But as s
watched him dispose of the remainder of his tea, deal aggressively wi
a piece of pastry and a second cup, the hard lines came back into h
face, the unfriendly gleam into her eyes. "Well, and what are you goi
to do now then?" she asked.

Mr. Oakroyd pushed aside his cup. It was a little gesture of despa
"Line up for t'dole till another job turns up."

"And 'ow long 'ull that be?"

"Don't ask me. You know what it is now. That bag o' tools 'ull here a long time, I'm thinking." He stood up now and looked across t his tools, lying on the sofa. Then he glanced down at his dirty old vorking clothes, and suddenly arrived, he knew not how or why, at a ueer little decision. "I'm off upstairs to change my clothes," he an-ounced, and departed.

When he came down again, he found his wife preparing Leonard's ea. He saw at a glance that she had made up her mind about some-hing: her lips were tightly folded upon some recent decision. He vaited for her to speak, turning, in his misery, to the old-time comfort f *Old Salt.*

"Well, that settles it," she began.

"What settles what?" he asked uneasily.

"Albert Tuggridge comes 'ere," she announced. Then, before he had ime to do more than remove his pipe, she charged in, working herself p to a fury of justification. "Now, don't start on again, don't start on. You've just thrown your job away, you're not going to throw this away n' all, that you're not. If t'lad's still willing to come, 'ere he comes, and ooner the better. If it takes any more work, it'll be mine and I'll have t to stand, so it's more my business ner yours, and I say he can come. We've got to live, 'aven't we? You'd got little room to talk when you vere in work, and you've less now."

"You might 'a' let me off Albert for this one night anyhow," he said uietly.

This only made her angrier. "It's got to be settled, 'asn't it? An' et me tell you this, if Albert don't come, Leonard might be going. I eard 'em saying summat t'other night. I don't think t'lad would leave is mother, but 'e might, wi' you always on to him. And then where hould we be? Just when he's getting a good wage, too!"

So that was it. He was angry too now. "If Albert comes 'ere," he aid firmly, "I go."

"Don't talk so soft. Where are you going? Are you going to live at 'Midland Hotel on your dole money?"

"Not so much about the dole! It's first time it's had to be mentioned n this 'ouse, let me tell you." He took his wounded pride to the door nd there brooded over his pipe. When he swivelled his pipe from one corner of his mouth to the other, his elbow set something rustling in hi inside coat pocket. There were four five-pound notes there.

"'Ere we are at last, the old firm!" This was Leonard. His fathe followed him into the living-room. "Tea ready, Mar?" cried the yout gaily. "That's the stuff!"

"Got on all right, Len?" asked his mother, bringing the large f kipper from the fire.

"Ab-so-lutely! D'you know what I made in tips? Guess. Eigh and-threepence. Eight-shillings-and-threepence. Not so dusty. Goo old Gregson's!" His mother poured out a cup of tea for the conquerin hero.

"Good job we're gettin' it from somewhere," she remarked. "You father's finished at Higden's."

"What's this?" A close observer might have noticed a subtle chang at once in Leonard's manner.

His father, for once, was a close observer. "All right, all right," h said. "Give it a rest for a minute. Is that t'paper you've got there?" It was, and Mr. Oakroyd, claiming it, retired to a corner of the sofa plodding steadily and miserably down the columns of the *Bruddersfor Evening Express* and trying to shut his ears to the whispering of th other two at the table.

Quarter of an hour later, on arriving at the fifth page, it was no necessary for him to try to fix his attention on the paper. His attentio was securely riveted there. He stared and stared at a report headed *Street Robbery. Local Sportsman's Loss.* Phrases leaped up to meet hi eye: "The well-known local sportsman, Mr. George Jobley . . . return ing to his home in Park Drive, Merton Park, Bruddersford, last nigh . . . Mr. Jobley had been attending various race-meetings . . . had lef his friends to walk the short distance to his home . . . attacked an robbed . . . at least £120 missing . . . strange affair . . . most impor tant street robbery in Bruddersford for years . . . Mr. Jobley not injure but some shock." And the last sentence of all held his eye longest: "Th police announce that they possess a valuable clue to the identity of th assailant." What was this?

"'Ere, who's this chap, George Jobley?" he demanded.

“That’s the bookie feller that’s been robbed,” replied Leonard. “I now him well by sight. He’s one o’ the lads.”

“What’s ’e like?”

“Tallish feller with a red face. Always dressed in a check suit and ats. What’s up?”

“Nowt!” Mr. Oakroyd returned untruthfully. George! He stared at e report again. “The police announce that they possess a valuable ue . . .” Nay, but a hundred and twenty pounds! It had nothing do with him, nothing at all. There were a thousand things a per- ctly innocent citizen might do to clear himself, but now Mr. Oakroyd ould not consider them, for his little world was shaking, collapsing, d now another prop had been kicked away. One thing coming on top f another!

As if to confirm this, a voice came roaring from the doorway. “Hello, ello, hello, hello! Ev’rybody at ’ome, and smilin’! Oh, I do like a ipper for my tea! What’o, Len! ’Evening, Mrs. Oakroyd!” And who ould this be but Albert?

“Oh, my God!” And groaning thus, Mr. Oakroyd flung down his aper and rose to his feet.

“Hello, hello!” cried Albert, still loudly but this time indignantly. What ’ave I done wrong?”

“Take no notice of ’im, Albert.” Mrs. Oakroyd gave her husband a rious glance, then, with an astonishing quick-change, smiled at her sitor. “Come in and sit yer down. You know you’re welcome. An’ other thing, if you want to stay ’ere, you can do.”

“Oh!” cried her husband. “And who says so?”

“I say so.”

“And so do I,” Leonard added truculently.

Mr. Oakroyd took a quick step towards his son, who immediately ropped his truculence and, indeed, seemed to flinch, like a very small oy. But then Mr. Oakroyd pulled himself up and stood still, a man bay, thinking hard. The next moment he had dashed upstairs.

Once there he began looking about him eagerly. “I must ’a’ summat,” muttered. There was the suitcase, Mrs. Oakroyd’s pride. No, he ouldn’t take that. There was the old round tin trunk. Too heavy d cumbersome. Then he remembered the basket thing, and pulled it out of the corner where it had been for the last fifteen years. It wa very light and quite small, only eighteen inches long and a foot deep and it would hold all he wanted to carry. Into this absurd receptacle— or at least one half of it, for the other half would have to be jamme on as a lid—he stuffed a nightshirt and a day shirt, three collars an some handkerchiefs, a muffler, a vest and a pair of pants, and his shavin kit. When he had jammed on the top half, he bethought him of hi old mackintosh, and folded it round the little basket trunk before h fastened it with the strap, which was still intact and boasted of a holde for the hand. Then he put on a pair of strong boots and hurried dow stairs, basket in hand, to confront three astonished faces.

"What in the name o' goodness——!" cried his wife.

"I'm off," he announced.

"Where to?" asked Leonard, still staring. "Yer can't go like tha Par. Where can you go to?"

"Never mind, never mind!" Mrs. Oakroyd was white with tempe "Let 'im go, let 'im go! Tryin' 'is tricks! 'E won't hear a word fro me about stayin'. Let 'im go. 'E'll be in a diff'rent frame o' mind whe 'e comes back. And that won't be so long either."

"You can do what you like wi' t'place now," said Mr. Oakroyd. "It yer own. There's a week's money there and no doubt you'll manag after that."

"Manage!" cried his wife, in a fury of scorn. "Of course we ca manage. Nivver better off. You've been wanting a lesson some tim and now you're runnin' to get it. Go on, go on."

Mr. Oakroyd said nothing, but moved over to the sofa and took u his bag of tools, dumping it beside the basket trunk. Then he stuck h old brown cap at the back of his head, and prepared to depart.

" 'Ere," said Albert, pointing to the table. "What about that?"

"That's right," said Leonard. "You'll 'ave to 'ave that." And h held out the insurance card.

Mr. Oakroyd stood staring at the greenish-blue card in his hand, sta ing as if he were in a dream. *Man—Age 16 to 65 . . . Failure to su render this card promptly . . . If the Insured Person . . . The Insur Person . . .* All so familiar and yet so strange. He stood staring, baffle lost in the dark of a world of notices and notifying, of sneering Co ades and stupid autocratic managers, of buzzers that kept your feet from he road, of signs that could never be hoisted, of daughters that grew up, aughing and singing, and then vanished over the sea. Then something inside him flared and went shooting through this bewildered dark ike a rocket, and Mr. Oakroyd committed a crime.

"Oh, to hell wi' t'card!" he cried, and tore it across and threw the ieces into the fire. Then, leaving horror-stricken amazement behind im, he picked up his bag of tools and his little basket trunk and made or the door.

"Now you've done it," they were crying. "Where yer going?"

"Down South," he replied, and vanished into the night.

Chapter Two

MISS TRANT TAKES A HOLIDAY

I

ONCE more we look down upon English hills, lit by the sam September sun. But it is another England; the dark Pennine have been left far behind; the grim heights of ling and peat and blac rock, the reeking cauldrons that were the valleys, all have vanished Here are pleasant green mounds, heights of grass forever stirring to th tune of the southwest winds; clear valleys, each with its gleam o water; grey stone villages, their walls flushing to a delicate pink in th sunlight; parish churches that have rung in and rung out Tudor Stuart, and Hanoverian kings; manor houses that have waited for new from Naseby and Blenheim and Waterloo and Inkerman and Ypres then have let their windows blaze through the night or have suddenl grown still and dark, but have kept their stones unchanged; and her and there, in the wider valleys, little woods where you could pla *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* and gardens shaped and coloured, to th last inch of lawn cross-gartered with stone paths, from the tallest hollyhock to the smallest rose-bush, for the music and happy folly of *Twelft Night.* This is, indeed, another England, this green and windy outpos of Arden. Over to the west, beyond the deep channels of the river is the Welsh Border country, a Celtic place, with hills as dark an mysterious as a fragment of Arthurian legend. But here, in the Cotswolds, all is open and pleasant, a Saxon tale of grass and grey ston wind and clear running water. We have quitted the long war of th north. Here is a place of compromise, for Nature has planed off he sharp summits and laid down green carpets in place of bog and heathe and rock, and man has forsworn his mad industrial antics, has settle himself modestly and snugly in the valleys and along the hillsides, ha otted out his sheep and put up a few tiny mills, and has been content. es, these two signed a peace here, and it has lasted a thousand years. Chipping Campden is to the north of us, Cirencester to the south, urford to the east, and Cheltenham to the west. This grey cluster of ofs, with the square church tower in the middle, is almost equidistant om all those four admirable townships. It is the village of Hitherton-n-the-Wole. Sometimes motorists, hurrying from lunch at Oxford to a at Broadway or Chipping Campden, lose their way and find themlves at Hitherton, and the little books prepared for their use tell them once that Hitherton has 855 inhabitants, closes early on Wednesday, npties its letter-box at 5.30 p.m., boasts an hotel, *The Shepherd's Hall* 3 bedrooms) and a garage, J. Hurley & Son, and has at least one thing orth looking at, for the account closes with the command—*See Church.* ery few of them do stay to see the church, though the rector, the ev. Thomas J. S. Chillingford, has not only written a short history of but has also published this history as a pamphlet: *Reprinted from the Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archeological Society";* d any visitor who appreciates an extraordinarily fine rood-screen when sees one (to say nothing of two possible leper-windows on the north de) cannot fail to obtain a copy of this pamphlet. But away they go, ese motorists, and never once turn their heads to remark, with Mr. hillingford, that the church "from a distance suggests a brooding-other-bird with head erect." Thus when any strange and expensive-oking motor car stops there, everybody in Hitherton, with the excepon of Mrs. Farley of *The Shepherd's Hall* and J. Hurley and Son, who e always hopeful, prepares at once to point the way to other and more portant places.

There are some days, however, when people do not lose their way d find themselves in Hitherton but deliberately go there and stay ere. This is one of the days. For the last three weeks the countryde has been plastered with notices saying that Messrs. Medworth, Higgs d Medworth would sell by auction and without reserve the remaing effects of the Old Hall, Hitherton-on-the-Wole. Well-informed ople—and almost everybody in Hitherton is well-informed—have been lling one another ever since old Colonel Trant died, several months o, that there was sure to be a sale. It was known for certain that the Trants were not so well-off as they used to be. It was known t that Miss Elizabeth Trant, who had looked after her father ever sin her mother's death, fifteen years ago, would not live on at the Hall b at the Cottage. Miss Elizabeth had been left everything, it was sai though she was the youngest of the Colonel's three children. But th she well deserved everything the Colonel could leave her—indee deserved more than that—for had she not stayed on in Hitherton an looked after him in his old age? And in the last years he must ha been a trial, too. He had had to miss the last two Flower Shows an could not even hobble to church, the poor old gentleman. It was a bles ing when he found his way in the end to the churchyard. And Mi Trant, who must be about thirty-seven, though being so straight an slim and fair she does not look it, had taken care of him year aft year and had hardly left the village for more than a night this lon time; whereas her brother, who was some sort of judge in India, an her sister, who had married well and lived in London, rarely came ne the place. Everybody knew that what with the Colonel's retired p going and debts to be paid off and one thing and another, Miss Tra would have less than £200 a year for herself. That was why s intended to live at the Cottage, to which all the things she wanted ha already been removed, and why all that remained at the Old Hall, n to be let, was being sold by auction.

It is a long time since Medworth, Higgs and Medworth last descend upon Hitherton. This is a great day. Any number of cars have go up to the Old Hall. Already Mrs. Farley has had to open another bot of whisky, and J. Hurley and Son have had to mend two punctur and see what they could do with a very queer magneto. People, qui ordinary people, not dealers, have come from as far as Bourton-on-th Water and Winchcombe and Great Barrington. As for dealers, th have come from the ends of the earth. There are at least two fro Cheltenham and three from Oxford and one from Gloucester, all pro antique dealers and not merely grocers and drapers who keep a roo upstairs filled with second-hand furniture. Not that there are not a of them here, for of course there are quite a number. And it is sa that there is one man, the one with eyeglasses and a pointed beard, w represents some big London firm. He did not come down specially, it is his business to tour the country, but here he is. Then for every one of these professional buyers there must be at least twenty amateurs, local people who have come to see if they can pick up a bit of china or a bedstead. Last of all, there are all the people who have not come to buy anything, but to see what the Old Hall looks like inside, to walk round the garden, to turn things over and over and get in the way, to enjoy themselves. These visitors, many of whom have brought all their children, easily outnumber the others, and just as they were the first to arrive, so they will be the last to go. "Always the same, always the same!" cried Mr. James Medworth to the protesting Miss Trant. "They *will* come, and there's no stopping 'em." Mr. Medworth has spent years pushing his way through rooms crowded and overheated with these people, and now regards their presence as something inevitable. Still, they laugh at his little jokes, and Mr. Medworth has a stock of little jokes. He is a middle-aged man with a very wide mouth and a glitter of large protruding teeth, so that he looks like a jovial shark. Miss Trant does not like him, but is quite willing to believe her solicitor, Mr. Truby of Cheltenham, who says: "Smart man, Medworth. Smart man. Keen people."

She was there at the Hall this morning, when people began to arrive and look round, but did not stay very long. She is not very sentimental and all her own cherished possessions have been removed to the Cottage, but nevertheless she discovered that the sudden disintegration of a home, however desolating that home might have been sometimes, into a mere jumble of objects, gave her no pleasure. All the things now looked so naked, so helpless. "Awful lot o' junk here," she heard one man say to another, dealers every inch of them; and she hurried round the corner, only to run into that familiar steel engraving of Lord Raglan, now Lot 117, and to find that his lordship was glaring into vacancy, cutting her dead. But all the things were like that, either indignant or wistful. She retired, wishing she had taken more of them to the Cottage, though she knew very well that the Cottage was too full already.

She found Mrs. Purton putting the Cottage in order, and spent the next hour or two helping her. Mrs. Purton had been cook at the Hall, and her husband—and his father before him—had been gardener, and now they had both been transferred, for the time being, to the Cottage.

Mrs. Purton "didn't 'old with auctioneering," apparently regarding it as a frivolous pastime, and so she had stayed at home all day. But Purton was up at the Hall, partly because he was a sociable man and had no intention of missing such an event, and partly because he was also very loyal and believed that his presence would put a stop to any thieving, particularly in the kitchen garden. So in order that no vegetables should be taken, he was spending his time following the auctioneer round from room to room, apparently convinced that it was Mr. Medworth, his clerks, and the dealers, who would want watching. It was Purton who brought news of the sale.

"Is it all over, Purton?" cried Miss Trant, as soon as she saw him coming down the garden.

He came up, touched his cap, then, putting his hands in his trousers pockets, he began swaying back from the hips. This was his favourite attitude when he had anything important to say, so that Miss Trant, who knew her man, realised at once that he was bursting with news. Not that he looked excited. You cannot expect a gardener who for the last six years has won the first prize for onions (Ailsa Craigs)—to say nothing of any number of minor events—at the Hitherton and District Show, to betray his feelings.

"No, Miss, rightly speaking, it isn't over," he replied. "But what's left don't amount to much. A lot o' people's goin' now. But that that bit of a sideboard that stood in the 'all, that old un——" and he stopped talking only to sway more violently.

"You mean the Tudor one. I know. I couldn't find a place for it here, Purton, and they say it's very valuable. What happened to it?"

"A 'undred and forty pound," announced Purton, staring at her solemnly. "A 'undred and forty pound, that's just fetched."

"Isn't that splendid, Purton!" Miss Trant looked at him with shining eyes, and did not seem a day older than twenty.

He stopped swaying, removed one hand from its pocket, and held up three fingers very impressively. "Three of 'em after it at the finish that's all—three! Dealers they was. An Oxford feller, and a Cheltenham feller, and a little chap with a beard that's come from London Three of 'em! And they 'ardly says a word, 'ardly a word. Never see anything like it!"

“What did they do then?”

“Winks. Just winks.” And Purton produced three of them too, very low and solemn affairs, to show her how it was done, and then stared t her while she tried hard not to giggle. “Mr. Medworth, ’e says ‘Goin’ t ninety’ and then one of ’em winks, and Mr. Medworth says ‘Ninety-ive’ and looks at another of ’em, gets a wink and ’as it up to a hun- red. ‘And five’ says the chap with a beard, and then they starts winkin’ gain, and then it’s winked right up to one ’undred and forty pound. E’s done well, ’as that thar sideboard.”

“I never thought it was worth as much as that, Purton.”

“You wouldn’t think so, Miss, would you—just a bit of an old side- oard,” said Purton, speaking very confidentially. “It wouldn’t surprise e if it woren’t. It’s this ’ere competition that does it. Carries you way. You think you must ’ave it. I once found meself landed with n runner ducks that I no more wanted nor thought o’ buying when I vent up and ’ad a look at the chap selling ’em than I thought o’ buying ring-tailed monkey. Got carried away. Plenty ’as been carried away is afternoon up at that thar auctioning. Mr. Medworth says it’s a good ale. I’ll be back thar, Miss, as soon as I’ve had a bit to eat. I’ll ’elp o clear up. There’ll be a nasty mess when they’ve done, I know.”

For the first time that day, Miss Trant began to feel excited about the ale. Mr. Medworth had told her that it was impossible for him to say eforehand what the things would fetch; it all depended on the number f people who came, the sort of people and the mood they were in; nd the whole lot might go for less than five hundred pounds, but on he other hand it might realise something like a thousand. It was impos- ible to doubt anything that Mr. Medworth said about such matters. iss Trant had tried, with some measure of success, to regard the whole roceeding as so much dull routine—one of the innumerable dreary hings that had had to be done since her father died—but now she ealised that this was a gigantic gamble, a homely Monte Carlo, got p for her benefit. The difference between a good sale and a bad one ight mean a difference of several hundred pounds, which in their turn ould add a pound or two a month to her income. You could work it ut in grades of China tea or silk stockings, that difference. And now was being decided. She walked up and down the little Cottage garden, her head humming with addition and subtraction as it had done many a time these last few years, when she had had to pay all the bills and keep the accounts for her father. She was poorer now but she did not feel poorer. Actually she felt vaguely rich. "It's because I've heard so much *talk* about money," she told herself, thinking of the discussions she had had with Mr. Truby in his Dickens-ish little office, and then, more recently, with Mr. Medworth, who was at once too teethy and jovial to be a gentleman.

She saw Purton return to the Hall, but did not follow him. After a restless half hour or so in the Cottage, mostly spent in picking things up, walking about with them, and then putting them down again, she went to the bottom of the garden. The village below seemed to be full of cars, hooting through the main street and then roaring away to the Oxford or Cheltenham roads. The Sale must be all over now. She would walk across and see.

When she approached the Hall, picking her way through a smelly muddle of people and cars and vans, the glorious September afternoon seemed to change at once. Its ripe gold became hot and dusty gilt. The Hall itself seemed smaller in this strange atmosphere, made up of straw and string and petrol and stares and silly jokes and perspiring bargainers. The place gaped vacantly, like a once handsome old idiot. A she skirted the crowd in front and made her way to a side door, she had a glimpse of certain familiar tables and chairs and pictures now being lifted into vans and carts, and that glimpse made her feel, a nothing that had happened before during these last few months had made her feel, that her life indeed was changed, beginning all over again. Those things had seemed more fixed and inevitable than th constellations, and now they were being hurried through the dust. They too were beginning all over again. And before she had reached th side door, she found herself choking a little, close to tears. She brushed past the men who were sweeping up the litter in the passages and made for the hall itself, the glory of the house. There she disturbed the rector, Mr. Chillingford, who was peering at the woodwork throug a large reading glass.

He looked up, startled. "Hello! I had to have a look at this panellin at the back, now that I can see it properly. I knew it was differen rom the rest. I told my wife it was only this morning. Not that she aid it wasn't, of course, because she's not interested in this sort of hing." Then he brought his round red innocent face closer to hers, nd said, more gently: "You look worried, Elizabeth. All this hasn't een very pleasant for you, has it? You shouldn't have come here; ou should have kept out of the way, my dear."

"I suppose I ought," she replied vaguely. "But I have kept out of he way most of the time. And I'm not feeling what you think I'm eeling. It's not sentiment about this place that's worrying me." She topped, then smiled at him rather wanly.

"You're like Dorothy and all the other young people I know nowdays," he said. He always thought of Elizabeth Trant as a contemporary f his daughter and her friend, though actually she was ten years older. He saw her as a tall brisk schoolgirl who would one day become a voman. It was something undeveloped, immature, sexless, in her that ostered such conceptions. "Yes, you're like the rest," he continued. You think there's something to be ashamed of in sentiment. That's vhy it seems to be dying out, leaving the world. But I don't see myelf that the world will be a better place without it. Not a bit, not bit! It'll be a worse place. So don't you be ashamed of your feelings, ny dear." And he gave her a little pat or two on the shoulder.

"I'm not. I'm only trying to be honest about them. And it really s something quite different."

"What is it then?" he enquired indulgently.

"I don't know—quite. It's too complicated." But she did know, hough she had neither the will nor the words at her command to ell him. It was not because something had ended for her but because he had just seen how it ended that she was so troubled, so close to ears. It seemed as if her father's life had not come to its end in the hurchyard there, but here and now, in the dust and straw and shouting, iad been bargained and frittered away into oblivion this very afternoon. She seemed to have had a sudden terrible glimpse of life as it really vas, and was ready to weep at the thought of its strange dusty littleness.

"All the things you really want, of course, have been removed to the Cottage?" Mr. Chillingford knew very well they had, but the question eemed to him to have a certain consolatory value.

"Yes, everything," she told him, and stared at the fantastically empt hall, into which the heavy sunlight came oozing.

"And I'm told it's been a splendid sale, a splendid sale," he adde cheerfully, as they walked together to the front door.

Just outside, Mr. Medworth himself was glittering and booming an mopping his brow. At the sight of Miss Trant, he triumphantly raise a hand. "A very successful afternoon, I'm told," said Mr. Chillingfor opening the subject for him.

"Couldn't be better, couldn't be better," he cried, and then looked s business-like that Mr. Chillingford hurried away at once. "We're ju finishing off now, Miss Trant, the figures, y'know. Over a thousan I'm confident of that. Yes, over a thousand."

"Why, that's even more than you thought it would come to, eve at the best, isn't it?" Miss Trant felt rich again, in spite of her sob acquaintance with figures.

"Well, I wouldn't say that because I'm never surprised, never," M Medworth said, very judicially. "But we've been lucky today, ver lucky. Some keen men here, real competition. And"—here he lowere his voice and hid his teeth—"it was lucky you took my advice abou the walnut pieces and left them in. Worth far more to these fello than they are to you. All a fashion!"

"Did they sell very well, then?"

"Fetched ridiculous prices, ridiculous! Knew they would, if we g the right people here. That little bureau went up to thirty-five. Thre of 'em after every piece." And Mr. Medworth continued in this strai for the next ten minutes, at the end of which he had to break off b cause he found a mass of documents thrust under his nose.

"We've got it now," he announced, five minutes later. "One thousan and sixty-five pounds, fourteen shillings and sixpence, that's what w make it. That's less our commission, y'know. All your own, Mis Trant, eh? Yes, all your own. Shall we settle up with Mr. Truby Ah yes, I'll settle with Mr. Truby tomorrow. Good!" He turne away as if to depart and then swept round again so quickly that h made Miss Trant feel dizzy. "The house," he cried, lifting a long fa forefinger. "We mustn't forget that. They're cleaning it up now, an tomorrow, Miss Trant, perhaps you could get a woman or two in t inish it off. And a gardener to tidy up. You could, eh? I'll tell ou why. We're going to get rid of the house sooner than I thought. nquiry came in yesterday, and I'll send 'em over day after tomorrow. ow's that for you? Send some one with 'em, of course, but thought ou might like to show 'em round a bit yourself. Sure you don't want o sell? No. Quite right, quite right. Well, we'll stick at a hundred nd fifty, not a penny less. Get it easily, best house in the district. ay after tomorrow then, morning if possible. And settle with Mr. ruby. Good afternoon, Miss Trant. Go-od afternoon. Here, where's harlie?" But this last shout was not intended for Miss Trant, and ow we have finished with Mr. Medworth.

Miss Trant returned to the Cottage, richer by the sum of one thousand nd sixty-five pounds, fourteen shillings and sixpence. She walked uickly and erectly down the lane, then tidied up the Cottage and tidied p herself, dealt justly with an excellent cold supper, wrote a few letters nd read a chapter or two before going, rather earlier than usual, to bed; nd nobody who saw her could have guessed what she was feeling. ere was the trim, the brisk, the efficient Miss Trant that everybody new, with not a single hair of that light-brown and unbobbed mass isturbed. Nevertheless, she felt as if she were lost.

"It's weak and silly to feel like this," she told herself firmly. "In he morning, I must begin all over again." Before she could do more han turn over a few vague plans, she was asleep, dreaming perhaps f the long-deferred payment of life to her youth, that youth which he calendar, lying to her bright face, said had slipped by. And now itherton was itself again, quiet under the glimmer of stars. There ere no cars parked in the main street. The last van had shaken itself rom the Hall long ago. J. Hurley and Son had closed the garage nd were celebrating their victory over the queer magneto by eating large late supper of cold potato pie. In the taproom of *The Shepherd's* *all,* Purton was finishing his final half-pint and also the whole ques-ion of dealers' winks. The dealers themselves, the little buyers, the ight-seers, had long dispersed, and with them all the chairs and tables nd chests of drawers and china and guns and books and steel en-ravings and Indian screens and Burmese gongs, all gone out to strange laces, leaving their Colonel resting in the churchyard, and his daughter sleeping under this roof of her own, still in familiar Hitherton and ye perhaps really in a new world.

II

The next morning, Miss Trant, looking through her window at th radiant vapour, decided that the day would be fine and that it shoul be honoured by her golden-brown jumper suit, a recent and triumphan find in Cheltenham. In the little dining-room, polished and trim an full of sunlight, she found a picture postcard awaiting her. On on side were the Glastonbury ruins. On the other was some equally ruinou and picturesque handwriting: "Isn't this appalling? Must have bee invented for Americans. Can I descend upon you some time tomorrov dinner-ish? Love, Hilary." This was her nephew, the only son of th Indian Judge. He had recently come down from Oxford. Miss Tran looked very thoughtful over this card. She was not sure whether sh wanted to entertain Hilary or not.

Before she could make up her mind whether Hilary would be pleasure or a nuisance, Mrs. Purton waddled in, set down a boiled eg a toast-rack, and a teapot, and then proceeded in a very leisurely fashio to explode a bomb.

"They do say, Miss——" Mrs. Purton began, and then stopped, hol ing, as it were, the smoking bomb in her hand.

Miss Trant smiled at her. "Well, what are they saying now? Don frighten me, Mrs. Purton."

"They do say——" she stopped again. Then it came—bang! "Mi Chillingford, Miss Dorothy, 'as just got herself engaged to be married

"What!" Miss Trant nearly shrieked. "It can't be true. I've neve heard anything about it."

"It come this morning in a letter," said Mrs. Purton, enjoying he self. "Mrs. Chillingford she tells it to Agnes, and Agnes tells it young Cripps as brings the milk, and young Cripps tells it to me. An she'll 'ave to be married very soon and then go out to Asia or Ind or Jamaikie or one o' them places, 'cos it's a young gentleman as wor there."

"I wonder who it is?" Miss Trant stared at Mrs. Purton's plump r face as if she might find the name written there.

"That I *don't* know, Miss." Mrs. Purton took her tray and turned go. "And one o' them cars as come for furniture last night got uck in a ditch on the Cheltenham road. Drunk, I'll be bound!" And e made her favourite exit, nodding her head like a minor prophet.

Miss Trant cared nothing about the fate of cars on the Cheltenham oad, but the news of Dorothy Chillingford's engagement, totally un- xpected, left her a little dazed. Her plans, vague as they were, had ounted upon Dorothy's companionship or, at least, neighbouring high pirits. She felt hurt, too, at not being told, that is, not being told prop- ly. She debated whether to look in at the Chillingfords', but decided gainst it. "If Mrs. Chillingford doesn't arrive within an hour," she ld herself, "I shall know there's nothing in it, just village gossip." urton was up at the Hall, restoring order in the big garden, and so e took his place for the morning among the Cottage flower beds.

She had not very long to wait. As soon as she saw Mrs. Chilling- rd's agile little figure between the grenadier lines of hollyhocks, she new that she had heard no mere idle rumour. "Good morning, my ar," Mrs. Chillingford gasped. "I came round to ask you over to a this afternoon." Dorothy's engagement was written all over her.

This was a moment worthy of Mrs. Chillingford. She was a small ringy woman, with no shoulders and rheumatic joints but with a hting face, hooked nose and snapping eyes, and an indomitable spirit. he rector himself, so long as such subjects as leper-windows, the Uni- rsity Commission, and Anglo-Catholicism were avoided, was one of e most placid of mortals, and there are few quieter places in this island an Hitherton. Yet Mrs. Chillingford had contrived to turn her life ere into a saga. From Monday morning to Saturday night she flung t ultimatums, mobilised, gave battle, and then shot into church on nday to hymn her victories and send glances like bayonets to right d left of her while her husband in the pulpit murmured of peace. isitors newly arrived from the North-Western Frontier or the Central merican republics found themselves hastily revising their notions of glish country life after an hour in her company, and soon returned London for a rest. There was just one period, lasting about six onths, when she lost all her zest for conflict and was very quiet indeed, rhaps because she found it so difficult to understand that John Chillingford was in future to be only a name on the village War memoria and then the good people of Hitherton and neighbourhood discovere a peace that made the subsequent Armistice a mere anti-climax. B it was a disquieting sort of peace, and perhaps they were not altogeth sorry when their rector's wife became herself again. When she di come to the end of those six months, buried away that strangely a quiescent little woman in black, there was no holding her at all. Com missioners, recruiting officers, great ladies, even Bishops and Lor Lieutenant, were sent reeling back. And that mild and not unwise ma the Rev. Thomas Chillingford, never uttered a word of reproof b even gently suggested new adversaries and hinted from time to tim he who had never an enemy, that he was in great need of her hel almost at bay. But for a year or two now Mrs. Chillingford had h to carry on her saga almost unaided by circumstance, doing what s could with Flower Show Committee meetings and the like; here at la was an event, and it found her worthy.

"Yes, it's true, and I was to tell you at once. His name's Atkinso Gerald Atkinson—you may have met him; he was down here onc staying with the Horrocks. Dorothy has been seeing him in town, course, but even then it's rather sudden, but no worse for that, course, not at all. He has an estate—coffee or something—in Keny and they're to be married almost at once because he must go back the very soon. And he's nearly two years younger than Dorothy—not th that matters, of course—and apparently his people, who still comma the purse-strings, don't approve—did you ever hear of such a thing

Now that Mrs. Chillingford stopped for breath, Miss Trant had ti to wonder whether Dorothy had not invented this opposition on t part of his family, the slightest mention of which instantly made h mother heart and soul for the match. If she had been told that t Atkinsons approved, she would probably have commanded Dorothy come home at once. But all Miss Trant said was: "Yes, I think I r member him. Tall and fair, wasn't he? He didn't seem at all t young for Dorothy." As a matter of fact, if it was the youth she w thinking of, he didn't seem too young for anybody. He was a ve old youth indeed.

"Of course not!" cried Mrs. Chillingford. "But then, I don't exp

hear any nonsense of that kind. I don't know what I do expect
hear, but I'm going up to town in the morning and shall see for
yself. Dorothy can count upon me, if there are fifty thousand Atkin-
ns there. Some of these people seem to imagine they can keep their
ildren in leading-strings all their lives. They've bought this boy an
tate out there—the poor boy has to do something and apparently he's
en very successful, the first year—and now they think they can dictate
him about his marriage. Leading-strings!"

"And what has Dorothy decided to do about everything?" Miss Trant
ked meekly.

"You mean about the date of the wedding, place, clothes, going out
ere, and so on? I don't know what the child has decided because
e knows better than to announce decisions on such a matter as this
me. I shall go up myself and do the deciding tomorrow. This is a
other's business. There'll be a great deal to do, a great deal, and
ry little time to do it in, unless of course I decide that the whole thing
ght to be postponed. I shan't do that, I think. What are you smiling
Elizabeth?"

Miss Trant bent down to remove a trowel. "I was just thinking,"
answered, not altogether truthfully, "how you're going to enjoy your-
f."

'Enjoy myself with all this fuss!" Then Mrs. Chillingford met her
end's amused gaze, and laughed. "Well, perhaps I shall. She's in love
th him, I can see that. Don't forget tea."

Miss Trant sighed as she turned again to her flower beds. It was
a sentimental sigh. She was certainly not conscious of any desire
be engaged herself. She did not envy her friend, Dorothy; indeed,
felt rather compassionate and at the same time a little irritated, be-
use she remembered Gerald Atkinson now and thought Dorothy
s throwing herself away upon him. But then she did not pretend
know a great deal about these affairs of the heart, and really found
m rather uninteresting. Her own life had never been disturbed
grand passions, and such relations as she had had with young men
l been cool and friendly. There was one exception. It had hap-
ed twelve years ago, when she and her father had returned from
lta all the way by boat. She had not been well, and the ship's

doctor, a tall bony young Scot, had been called in to examine her. H was gruff and shy at first, with an honesty as plain as daylight, bu they soon became friends, trod the upper deck together every mornin and quietly explored one another's mind and heart every night. Th last two days it had become quite exciting; every glance, every wor became electrical, significant; and then, with the land in sight, he ha suddenly changed, turned gruff and shy again, and he had let her g without saying anything, had just given her a handshake that hu and backed away with a ghastly sort of grin. His name was Hug McFarlane; his voice was very deep and very Scotch, one of those th bring out huge vowels and smashing consonants; and when he turne his face towards the light there was a fascinating glint of hair abou his cheek-bones. There was nothing about him she had forgotten, an though she rarely thought of him, perhaps he served as a secret standar in her judgment of young men. Thus, it suddenly occurred to her th he was worth at least six Gerald Atkinsons.

But the sigh was not for him, nor was it for Dorothy. It was ju a breath coming from a kind of emptiness. She was beginning to fe a little lost again. The feeling had not gone when she crossed to th Chillingfords' for tea.

"Elizabeth, you need a change," said Mr. Chillingford, wagging finger at her. "I've been keeping my eye on you lately, and you ne a change."

"Take my advice, my dear," said Mrs. Chillingford, "and leave th place as soon as you can. We shall miss you, of course, but you oug to go."

"Where?"

"Anywhere. Cheltenham. Oxford. London. It doesn't matter. S everything you have—I mean stocks and shares and things—and start business. That's what I should do in your place. Never hesitate a m ment. Go slap into business." Mrs. Chillingford said this with immen gusto, then went slap into a piece of sandwich cake.

"I've thought of it, you know," said Miss Trant. "But what cou I do? I don't know anything."

"Of course you do. Try this cake. You could open a shop and s hats or gowns, like Betty Waltham."

"Yes, but I've always been told that I haven't very good taste." This nded very feeble, she thought, but Miss Trant was nothing if not nest. Nevertheless, she believed in her heart of hearts that she had y good taste.

'Nonsense! You've splendid taste," cried Mrs. Chillingford, who very toriously had none at all. She went on to discuss other shops and ls who had marched out of the most aristocratic country houses to n them.

So far as I can see, my dear," remarked her husband, lighting his e, "it's only myself and this parish and perhaps—er—a certain lack capital that are preventing you from becoming a second Selfridge Woolworth." And he chuckled.

Perhaps it is," replied Mrs. Chillingford, briskly. "I know I wish ad Elizabeth's opportunities."

Now for my part," he added, turning to Miss Trant, "I think the y opportunity you ought to trouble yourself about just now is that going away for a little rest and change. A little travel, now. What ut Italy?"

Somehow I haven't the slightest desire to go to Italy," said Miss nt.

should hope not." Mrs. Chillingford was very emphatic. "Don't, goodness' sake, Elizabeth, turn yourself into one of those terrible arried females who spend their time in Italy. Look at Agatha thorpe and her sister. And the Murrells. No, anything but that."

taly then is condemned. We obliterate the whole peninsula," said Chillingford, with mild irony. He puffed away dreamily for a moments, then went on: "Now if I were in your place, I should something I've always wanted to do. I should have a little tour ell, perhaps not so very little, when you think of it—visiting all English cathedrals. You may not be very interested in ecclesiastic itecture——"

don't think I am, you know," Miss Trant murmured.

ossibly not." Mr. Chillingford was unperturbed. "But think what onderful picture of England you would have. Canterbury, Ely, wich, Lincoln, York, supposing you begin at that corner. A won- ul picture! You cross over to this side. Hereford, Gloucester, Wells,

Salisbury, and so forth. Wonderful!" His plump face was alight wit
enthusiasm.

Miss Trant found herself faintly kindled. "It does sound rather exci
ing when you think of it like that. And I've hardly seen any of tho
places."

"It's been a favourite project of mine for years," he said gravely.

"It's the first I've ever heard of it," cried Mrs. Chillingford. "Ar
I must say it sounds very dull to me. If there's one kind of tow
more like another, it's a cathedral town. Don't take any notice
him, my dear."

They juggled with cathedrals and shops a few minutes longer, ar
then Miss Trant went back to the Cottage and spent the next ho
and a half with *Redgauntlet,* which she was reading for the four
time. She had a passion for historical romances, not silly sentiment
stories passing themselves off under cover of a few cloaks and dagg
and "halidoms" or "Odds-fish," but real full-blooded historical tal
These she preferred to any other kind of fiction, and for the last twen
years they had been first her delight and then her solace. She lov
to carry a secret message from Louis the Eleventh of France to Charl
Duke of Burgundy; to journey to Blois in foul weather crying vengean
on the Guises; to peep out of a haystack at Ireton's troopers; to hi
in the heather after Prince Charlie had taken ship to France; to
thundering over the Rhine with Napoleon and his marshals. To
change passwords, to rally the Horse on the left, to clatter down t
Great North Road, to hammer upon inn doors on nights of wind a
sleet, these were the pleasures, strangely boyish, of her imaginati
Few people who came upon Miss Trant sitting erectly with a book e
imagined for a moment that she was happily engaged in drinking c
fusion to the League or firing a matchlock. But such was her ta
Neither the labourious satire nor the luscious sentiment of our pres
fiction gave her any pleasure. She liked a tale to open at once, in
very first chapter, a little door through which she could escape and h
bright sexless adventures. Novels about unmarried women who li
in the country, looking after aged parents or making do in gen
cottages, depressed her so much that she took pains to avoid them.

She had to dine with *Redgauntlet,* and it was after nine when eard Hilary's car wandering uneasily about the village. It was nearly n by the time they had put away the two-seater in the Hall garage, alked back to the Cottage, and settled themselves in the little drawg-room.

"Well, Hilary, now you must tell me all the news." But before he uld reply, she went on: "You know, I think you frighten me."

"Do I really? How splendid!" cried Hilary, in his high clear voice. e did not ask why he frightened her because he could see innumerable asons himself.

She replied, however, without being asked. "Now don't be flattered," continued. "It isn't exactly because you're an important young man m Oxford, though that has something to do with it. It's because e seen you change so quickly, from a little boy——"

'Oh, it's that!" Hilary was disgusted.

'Yes, I'm afraid it's that. It's like a terrible sort of conjuring trick. been here, year after year, going on in the same old way, but ost every time I've seen you, you've been something quite different, sery, prep school, public school, Oxford."

Yes, I suppose so. But I assure you I've stopped now," he said, rifle loftily.

No, I'm sure you haven't. You'll be getting married or growing a ustache——"

Heaven forbid!" Hilary shrieked. "This comes of living in the ntry, my dear. It's a morbid life. Look at all this rural fiction."

he looked at him instead. He was now a slim and elegant young , with a clear-cut and vaguely impertinent profile. Probably he the most outrageous opinions about everything. His father and her her, the Indian Judge, who had not seen him for years, would have rprise when he did see him. The thought gave her pleasure, for it ed to her that the Judge had never had his share of unpleasant rises. "Let me see," she murmured, "you're being called to the aren't you?"

'm supposed to be," he told her. "That's father's idea, and I'm eatdinners and that sort of thing. But I don't intend to go on with it. few fellows do, you know. Most of these barristers-in-embryo, spend all their time when they're up preparing little speeches for the Union, end as sporting journalists or music-hall agents or somethin of that sort."

For the next quarter of an hour, she listened to him proving th he was entirely unfitted for the Bar, a contemptible profession to a ma of real intellect, and, remembering her somewhat pompous and ove bearing brother, she listened with a certain malicious pleasure. Whe the Bar had been finally demolished, she asked him what his own plar were.

"Well, you've heard, of course, of *The Oxford Static?*" he began.

"No, I haven't. What is it?" And then, noticing his look of pain surprise, she went on: "I'm sorry. But we never hear about anythir down here."

He brightened. "No, of course not. You're out of touch, and th Grandfather and everything. *The Oxford Static* was a review we ra Three of us, Carrera-Brown—most brilliant man up, wonderful bra —and Sturge—he's a poet, you know—and me. It had a tremendo influence, simply tremendous. After a time, all the people who count up there daren't *move* without it, simply daren't *move*."

"What was it all about?"

"A review of all the arts, yes, all the arts, even dancing and fil We had a new point of view, you see." He was so excited now th he rose from his chair and began pacing the room, and his voice g higher and higher. "We Statics—that's what we call ourselves—awfu good name, isn't it?—believe that Art has got to be beyond emoti Life and Art have got absolutely choked up with filthy emotion, a we say the time has come for them to be—what shall I say?—f ingless, all calm and clear. Get rid of the feelings, first, we say. saw the whole thing about two years ago, one night when we w talking in Carrera-Brown's rooms, and we talked and talked until had settled it. What a night that was!"

"It must have been," his aunt murmured.

He paced up and down the room, waving his cigarette. "Then found the name, and very soon we brought out this review. Now w thinking of transferring the thing to town, calling it simply *The St* A monthly, we think. Lots of important people are interested— rera-Brown knows everybody, simply everybody, and Lady Bullard promised to help—and now we're each trying to raise some money to begin. I shall do the Drama and Films and French Literature. Cynthia Grumm, you know, who lives in Paris and has abolished the sentence altogether and makes new words all the time, has promised to write for us. But we've decided that there shan't be any names of contributors in the review, just numbers. I'm to be Static Three. That's a magnificent idea, isn't it? And Oppelworth is going to do some drawings for us, and be Static Six. We soon made a convert of him. He'd been going in for non-representational art—you know, no repre- entation of natural objects but just drawings suggesting the artist's motions, but now he sees that this won't do and so he's cutting out the motions and becoming a Static. We're even having music, too. Pure orm, you know."

"I'm not sure that I do know, Hilary," said Miss Trant, who had en- oyed herself but was beginning to feel very sleepy.

"Well, of course, I simply haven't begun to explain," he said ex- tedly. Then he caught sight of her stifling a yawn, and being a well- annered youth, instantly checked his ardour: "But look here, you ust be awfully tired. I suppose you go to bed about nine, don't you, a rule? Don't let me keep you up. We'll talk about all that in e morning. Are there any books I can read?"

"I shouldn't think so. There are books, but I don't suppose you can ad them."

"Well, I have one or two with me, and I'll scout about, if I may. I an't be able to sleep for hours yet, hours and hours. And now that e begun to talk about *The Static,* I feel more wakeful than ever."

"I can see that it excites you," said his aunt gravely.

"Yes, doesn't it?" replied the youth innocently. "I'm tremendously ited about the whole thing. Wouldn't you be? Think of the possi- ities and—oh, everything!"

She left him to make himself calm and clear as best he could, and nt to bed feeling more cheerful than she had done all day. The t that any month now *The Static* might arrive to revolutionise the hetic doctrines of the world, the fact that she knew nothing what- r about Cynthia Grumm or Oppelworth, to say nothing of Carrera-

Brown and Sturge,—such matters did not keep her from sleep five minutes. An aunt has her compensations.

III

There was only one letter by Miss Trant's plate the following morning but it was a very important letter indeed. It ran as follows:

My dear Elizabeth,

Did you know that your father owed me £600? He did, and he gav instructions to Truby that it should be repaid out of his estate. But whe Truby settled the debt, he also explained who would be losing the mone If it had been either your brother or sister—who are both well off, o were when I last heard of them—I should have taken it like a shot, bu I have no intention of taking it from you, and so have returned the £60 to Truby. Now don't be silly about this. I have as much as I wan and I know what your position is. I feel sure you are sensible enoug not to refuse the money. What are you going to do? Twenty yea ago, or even ten, I should have advised you to come out here, but th East isn't what it was, ruined by those damned silly student politics. you can guarantee me something that remotely resembles a summer, I' pay you a visit, but not before, for the last time I did nothing but shiv and wrap up.

Your affectionate uncle,

George Chatsworth.

She had read this once, in a rather dazed fashion, and was beginni again, when Hilary arrived, looking rather more Static than he h done the night before.

"That's my great-uncle, is it, the tea-planter man?" he said, after s had told him the news. "I saw him once, when I was still at scho He looked like Mark Twain. You'll take the money, of course?"

"I think so," said Miss Trant, rather slowly and dubiously.

"Why shouldn't you?" Hilary stared. "As a matter of fact, it's you and anyhow you've jolly well earned it. You haven't much money, h you?"

"No, I shall probably have about three hundred a year when I let the Hall. By the way, some people are coming to look at it to And I've about a thousand pounds over, from the Sale."

“Then you'll have a spare sixteen hundred roughly, with this windfall.” Hilary delicately chipped at his egg, then looked across at her with raised eyebrows. “I suppose you wouldn't like to put some money nto *The Static,* would you?”

“I don't think I would, Hilary,” she replied briskly.

“No,” he said, rather gloomily. “I thought you wouldn't. It's a pity, hough, because you'd enjoy the thing so much—I mean really being *n it*—and of course you would probably make something out of it. You lidn't mind my asking, did you?”

“Not at all.” She smiled at him, and decided at once not to tell him he real reason why she had refused, which was that she was not going encourage him to waste his time. “You see, there may be a family ow if you go on with this business——”

“Sure to be,” he put in calmly. “I haven't written to India yet, but told Aunt Hilda the other day and she was frightfully down on it. ut then she *would* be, you know. She's not like you. Her life's one ng orgy of emotionalism, don't you think?”

“And you see,” Miss Trant continued, after an amused glance of the ind at her sister Hilda confronted by the Statics, “I don't want to be ixed up in it, and I should be at once if I helped you.”

“Couldn't you put the money in anonymously?”

“It would soon come out, I mean my part in it. You know how ings do get about.” She herself did not know at all how such things t about, but it sounded convincing.

“Rather,” said Hilary, who knew even less. They looked at one other knowingly, and enjoyed themselves.

“I've got about a hundred that I can spare,” he said, after he had lit e first cigarette. “But I want about two hundred and fifty. I think hall sell that two-seater of mine. It's useless in town, anyhow. Only s its head off. Do you know anybody here who wants a two-seater? s a Mercia, last year's.”

“No, I don't think I do,” she said slowly, staring at him.

“What's the matter?”

She laughed. “Nothing. Shall we go out?” But she was still thinking about that two-seater.

He strolled over to the window. “What shall we do?”

“Anything you like. You're not interested in gardens, are you?”

“Not in the least,” he replied heartily. “I don't mind sitting in them on warm afternoons, but I simply can't dig them up or talk about them or anything of that kind. We might run round in the car.”

“I should like that. But stop, we can't go until I've shown those peopl the Hall. They're coming sometime today to look at it, and I promise to be here.”

“I think I shall stroll up there myself. I'll have a look at the ca and then if those people come, I shall have a look at them too. I'v never seen anybody examine a house.”

“Why, do you want to?” asked Miss Trant, with raised eyebrows.

“I want to see people doing all kinds of things,” he replied ve gravely. “I'm an observer. I want to see but not to feel. That's m duty now, to watch and record. There's rhythm in all these activiti and I want to be able to—to detach it. Think of the new films.” Aft making these enigmatic observations, Static Three looked at her ve solemnly, then, with a gesture of farewell, sauntered out of the roo

Miss Trant reached the bottom of the garden in time to see Hurley ancient and gigantic Daimler, the vehicle for all entrances and exits Hitherton, come slowly down the lane. Mrs. Chillingford was insi on her way to the station, and she waved as she passed. As the c disappeared, Hitherton and the bright morning seemed to shrink. M Chillingford was on her way to Paddington, to Dorothy, to the e battled Atkinsons, to adventures with the Army and Navy Stores a the shipping offices. “What are *you* going to *do,* to *do,* to *do?*” the seemed to roar back at her as it gathered speed down the hill. A she had no answer ready. She thought of the windfall of the morni six hundred pounds out of the blue, and felt a little quiver of exciteme You could do all manner of things with six hundred pounds, perh go all round the world. But she did not want to go all round world by herself. “I don't know what I want, that's the trouble,” told the great staring nodding dahlias. She found, however, that M Purton knew what she wanted, namely, some orders for lunch dinner, and after consulting with her, Miss Trant went out to sho

On her way back, she met Purton standing at the entrance to Hall. “I was looking for you, Miss,” he said, touching his cap, hen instantly jamming his hands in his pockets. "They've just come, vith a young feller from Medworth's. Look like these 'ere profiteers. Come in a car as big as a cottage."

She had no time to reply because at this moment the young fellow rom Medworth's himself suddenly appeared round the corner, raised is hat, and began, in a dramatic whisper, "We're trying for two hunred."

He got no further, however, because now another man, very tall, ery pale, and with a long drooping moustache, suddenly came round he corner, stared at everybody, took off his hat and forgot to replace , and mumbled: "Miss Trant? Yes? Rathbury. Come to look. . . . orry to trouble. . . . Beautiful morning. . . ."

By this time the familiar entrance to the drive seemed to Miss Trant have turned itself into a comic stage. She wanted to giggle at everying, but retained sufficient control over herself to tell Mr. Rathbury at she hoped he would like the house and that really it was rather arming.

"Just had a glance," Mr. Rathbury murmured. "Very delightful. es, certainly. Just what we're looking for. The very thing, I should ink. Most charming."

"Of course, as you'll see, it's not very big," said Miss Trant brightly, eling that she must say something.

"Not very big, no," the long moustache agreed. "No worse for that, ough. Not at all. Not these days. Just the thing, I fancy."

"So you're here."

Everybody jumped. The voice was very loud and stern, and it came om a square woman, with a purplish fat face and two prominent ring grey eyes.

"My wife," Mr. Rathbury muttered, fading out.

"Oh, this is the owner, is it?" shouted Mrs. Rathbury, staring away. iss Trant, isn't it? How d'you do?"

"Do you want me to show you round?" Miss Trant felt as if she were dressing a battleship.

'Quite unnecessary, I think, quite unnecessary. We'll just look round rselves for a few minutes. I don't expect we shall take the house

It's very small, isn't it? We think it will be too small, don't we?" She switched the stare on to her husband for a second.

"Yes, of course, rather small, certainly," he mumbled, carefully looking at nobody. "Drawback of course, being small."

"And then it's not really the type of house we're looking for, not the style, as my husband has probably told you already."

"No, not the style." Mournfully he fingered the long moustache "Not quite, certainly. Perhaps hardly at all."

"Not at all," Mrs. Rathbury shouted, giving them every one in turn a stare. "However, we might as well see it." Immediately she wheeled about and marched off, and her husband and the young estate agen hurried after her.

Miss Trant and Purton each drew a long breath, and looked at on another. "You'll be wantin' them thar pars down at the Cottage, Miss," said Purton very slowly. "I'll go and get 'em."

Miss Trant returned to the Cottage with her purchases, talked t Mrs. Purton, dusted the drawing-room, then walked back, slowly, ve slowly, to the Hall. As she sauntered up the drive, she thought sh saw Hilary disappearing into the garden at the back of the house. moment later the Rathburys emerged from the front door.

"Yes, we'll take it. But not a penny more than two hundred," M Rathbury was shouting to the agent. Then she saw Miss Trant. "I' just saying that we shall take it at two hundred. It's quite charmi quite charming, the sort of place that wants proper looking aft Several things to be done, of course." She stared at Miss Trant, th through her, it seemed, at all the other Trants, as if to accuse the all of neglecting the place. "We were fortunate in finding that you architect there to make suggestions."

Mr. Rathbury's moustache made some vague sound that implied was in entire agreement with her.

It was now Miss Trant's turn to stare. She caught the eye of Medworth's assistant, who looked both triumphant and puzzled. Tu ing to Mrs. Rathbury again, she saw with astonishment that that l was actually smiling at her. True, the eyes had no part in the sm but the rest of her face was amiably creasing.

"You never told us it was such a show place," Mrs. Rathbury shou in great good-humour. “I saw at once, of course, that it must be, and could be more of one, properly cared for. It was the young architect who told us all about it. Did he tell you he had come a hundred miles to see it?”

“I don't know,” Miss Trant stammered. “I don't quite understand. Who is this?”

“What was the name?” Mrs. Rathbury stared all about her as if the name must be written up somewhere. “Oh yes, of course—Mr. Static.”

There was no help for it. Miss Trant gave a little shriek of laughter. “I'm sorry,” she gurgled. “It's—it's such a silly name, isn't it?”

“Yes, rather; it is, certainly,” Mr. Rathbury mumbled, evidently under he impression that he had been appealed to.

“Indeed!” Mrs. Rathbury looked from one to the other in obvious disapproval. “It's a name of some importance, I understand, in—in rchitectural circles. What was it Mr. Static said he was an authority on?”

“Seventeenth-century panelled interiors,” replied the young estate agent, n what seemed to Miss Trant a rather queer tone of voice.

“Exactly! I ought to have remembered, because I knew the name well. eventeenth-century panelled interiors. This is a very good specimen, e said. But of course they want proper attention. A house of this ind is a responsibility, of course. Perhaps you're not interested in hese things, Miss Trant. Tell Johnson we're ready to go back now.”

Miss Trant was fighting an impulse to tell her that she could not ave the house after all. With this woman settled in the Hall, Hitherton ould be impossible, even though it meant that Mrs. Chillingford could egin a new saga. “It's strange,” she told herself, “that I don't care ore than I do. Perhaps it shows that I really am tired of living here.” nd she answered Mrs. Rathbury's questions meekly enough, said nothg about Hilary (which served her right), then referred her to Mr. Tedworth.

After lunch, during which Hilary was divided between the glee of e mischievous small boy and the natural shame of a solemn young tellect who has indulged his lower self, they drove to Cheltenham Hilary's car. There she saw Mr. Truby, who congratulated her on e result of the Sale, the gift of six hundred pounds, and the letting of the house, then told her that she ought to go away and enjoy herself. "You're comfortably off now," he added. "Much better than we expected. I'll keep this sixteen hundred pounds in a deposit account for you until you decide what to do with it. Don't worry about money. What you want now is a change," he concluded, with the air of a man who knew what a change was, even though he had never had one.

Miss Trant walked out of the dim office into the bright sunshine, feeling vaguely exhilarated. "How queer and old-fashioned solicitors' offices are!" she cried to Hilary. "Going to see Mr. Truby is like walking into a Dickens novel."

"How ghastly for you!" The Static shuddered. Then, as they foun a tea shop, he observed mournfully: "When you were in there, I took the car round to a garage to see what sort of price I should get for it. About seventy-five pounds, they said. That's about half of what it' worth. Isn't it a swindle? These garage people hate to pay cash fo a car. They'll allow you anything nearly if they are selling you an other." And having thus descended to this ordinary low level of though and feeling, he remained there throughout tea and his aunt smiled upo him.

About halfway home, on a quiet stretch of road, she asked him t pull up. "Do you think I might try to drive now?" she asked rathe breathlessly. "I have a licence because I've tried before, when Doroth Chillingford had a car. Will you explain about this one?"

"Nothing in it. The thing practically drives itself. Why do yo want to bother, though?" He jumped out and walked round the ca

"Because—if I can drive it, I'll buy it from you, Hilary; that is, you really want to sell it."

"You will!" cried the Static joyfully. "Of course I want to sell it

"And I'll give you what you say it's worth, a hundred and fif pounds."

"Oh! I say! Will you really? But are you sure?"

"Yes, I am sure," she said, firmly. "That is, so long as I can drive it

"Of course you can drive it," he cried, with mounting enthusias "Nothing easier! Let me show you where everything is. It really a good little car, you know."

And he did show her where everything was, and for the next ho she sat at the wheel under his tuition. So rapidly did she gain confidence that at last she drove them both home, passing two very large buses, a steam-wagon, and several jumpy rattling lorries, without slowing down to less than fifteen miles an hour, and finally sailing up the Hall drive, flushed and triumphant. Then followed ten minutes further instruction on getting it in and out of the garage (which was not a proper garage at all but an old stable), and Miss Trant discovered once again the terrors and dangers of reversing, but was assured by Hilary that all was well with her.

"I'll give you a cheque in the morning," she told him, as they sat at dinner.

"No hurry at all, you know," he explained, though his face had brightened. "Still, it would be rather useful. If we spent all tomorrow morning with the car—though you don't really need any more instruction from me, I can tell you—I could catch the afternoon train up o town. I hope you don't mind my running away at once, but the fact is, I must get hold of Carrera-Brown as soon as I can."

"I don't mind," she told him. "I shall probably go away myself very soon, perhaps the day after tomorrow." She was rather astonished when she heard herself announcing this departure. It was, so to speak, as much news to her as it was to him. Indeed, she was the more surprised of the two.

"Splendid!" he said, in an abstracted fashion, looking through her. She could see he was already busy meeting the other Statics.

That night she finished *Redgauntlet* yet once more, but this time she put it down without the smallest sigh. The dark mysterious hours ound her guiding a little blue Mercia down roads that nobody knew, oads that wound through the shining hills of a dream.

IV

Do you know——" Hilary began, looking down upon her from the arriage window.

"Well! Do I know what?" She smiled up at him.

That pitiless observer of the human race hesitated a moment. Then e continued: "There's something different about you today. It must e the car."

"Perhaps it is," she assented. "I'm beginning to feel reckless, Hilary. Do you know what number I shall be among the Statics?"

The train began to move.

"Not less than the fifty-second millionth!" she called, and waved him good-bye.

On the way home she pulled up beside a black figure plodding up the dusty hill.

"What's this? What's this?" cried Mr. Chillingford.

"Come in and see," she told him, and before they had climbed the hill he had accepted an invitation to tea and learned all about the car.

"I feel like going away in it at once," she confided, over their first cups.

Mr. Chillingford lowered his spectacles and raised his eyebrows. "By yourself?"

"Why not?"

"I don't know. No, of course. Why not?" He laughed and then they both laughed, and felt very friendly. Immediately afterwards, however, Mr. Chillingford fell into such a profound reverie that he crumbled walnut cake all over his clothes.

"Well?" she asked, at length.

"I'm sorry. Dear me, what a mess I've made! I was thinking you ought to begin with Ely. Just think of it! You would go down from these hills into the Midland plain, getting lower and lower the further east you went, until at last you would find yourself—as it were—at the bottom of the basin. Then you would see that colossal tower shooting up—a sublime spectacle, my dear Elizabeth. You've not seen Ely, of course? No, I thought not. That miraculous octagon! There's a kind of barbaric splendour about the whole place! You must begin with Ely." He was so excited now that he deposited his cup and saucer on the plate of sandwiches.

Miss Trant, who had been staring at him in amazement, suddenly remembered, and cried: "Of course! You're talking about a tour o the cathedrals."

"Indeed I am. Wasn't that the idea? Of course it wasn't, though How absurd of me! That was my idea, wasn't it? I said something bout it the other day. I thought that was what you were going to do. What an old egoist I'm becoming! I was thinking you might call on my old friend Canon Fothergill at Lincoln. That is, if you began at Ely. And, mind you, that's the place to begin at. But then, of course, you are not beginning anywhere, so to speak. Just my foolishness!" And he laughed a little.

"Yes, I am," said Miss Trant stoutly. "I'm beginning at Ely, just as you suggest. And I *will* call on Canon Fothergill at Lincoln, if he'll let me. And you *shall* tell me where to go."

Mr. Chillingford scrambled to his feet, spreading walnut cake in all irections. "I'll slip over to the rectory for my old map. It will be s good as a holiday to take a look at it again. I've done all this, very inch, in my time, on a pushbike, you know."

But Miss Trant brought out a map and for the next quarter of an our their two heads were bent over it. Mr. Chillingford showered oads, towns, inns, naves, transepts, upon her, and in his excitement pset the milk jug. He brought out pencil and paper, covered two heets with directions, crammed them into his pocket, then searched he room and declared they were lost. Miss Trant wanted to rush up-airs at once and hurl all her things into bags. "I'll start tomorrow morning," she announced.

"I shouldn't," he warned her. "It's Sunday tomorrow. Don't mis-ke me. I'm no Sabbatarian. Besides, there's more worship in going o look at Ely than in listening to me. But Sunday's a bad day to egin a journey. Wait a day. Start on Monday. There never was a Monday morning yet when I didn't want to be going somewhere."

And it was on Monday morning that she did set out, after a tremendous Sunday of packing and instructions to the Purtons and letters o all manner of people. She had a last five minutes' talk with Mr. hillingford, turned perilously to wave to him nearly at the corner, nd then went rolling down the hill, eastward out of Hitherton. The lley lay all golden in the deep sunshine; the morning was as crisp a nut; the roads scrawled invitations, the very wires above hummed int calls, to the misty blue beyond; and every turn of the wheel ought her a sense of mastery, and every milestone passed, bringing nearer the unknown and the gloriously irresponsible, gave her a new little thrill. Was she going across country to Ely? She was going anywhere, anywhere, wherever she pleased. This was the road to the first of the cathedrals, but it was also the road to—what? She didn't know, and delightedly she hugged her ignorance, vague and shining, a mist brightening with golden shapes, just like the morning itself.

In her bag were thirty pounds and a cheque book that would call at once on fifteen hundred more. And, snugly tucked away behind were all the nicest things she had, a dressing case she had only used once before, and four glorious historical novels, crowds of archers Jacobites, conspirators, dragoons, crying to be let loose at the first hou of lamplight. They were all running away from Hitherton, into th adventurous blue, together.

In a tangle of traffic at narrow Northleach she had to pull up besid a huge car that had come from the opposite direction. From this ca a familiar long drooping moustache cautiously emerged.

"Miss Trant, isn't it? Thought it was," it mumbled at her. "Lovel morning. Not going far, eh?"

"Oh, good morning, Mr. Rathbury," she called out, loudly and clearly "Yes, it's absolutely wonderful, isn't it? And I *am* going far, hundreds and hundreds of miles until I am lost." And she smiled, and di not stop smiling when she found herself confronted by a purple squa of face and a grey stare.

"I beg your pardon," shouted Mrs. Rathbury, now purpler than ev from bending so far forward. "Where did you say you were going We were coming over to look at the Hall again. We may want see you."

"I'm going to be invisible." Yes, she actually heard herself sayin it. And then she turned her attention to the clutch and gears, for ever body was moving again.

"What address?" came the scream, now from behind.

"No address. No-o a-a-dre-esss." She shouted it at the top of h voice. Not for years had she made such a noise. It was splendid.

Now the road emptied itself and broadened before her. A wind fr the southwest caught up to her and coloured her cheeks. (It we n and on until at last it found the smoke from Higden's mill, where r. Oakroyd was spending his very last day.) She shot forward and pward, then skimmed along one of England's little green roofs, this iss Trant that nobody at Hitherton had ever seen and perhaps would ever see.

Chapter Three

INIGO JOLLIFANT QUOTES SHAKESPEARE AND DEPARTS IN THE NIGHT

I

WE HAVE left all the hills behind; our faces are turned toward the long strands, salted and whistling, of the North Sea. Here the land is a great saucer, patterned with dykes and arrowy roads. T the north and to the south are smudges of smoke, the bright webbin of railway lines, towers that are older than the distant fields they chim to, Peterborough, Ely, Cambridge. We are on the edge of the Fens It is a place plucked from the water. Only here and there remains th old darkly gleaming chaos of marsh and reeds, alders and bulrushes the sudden whirr and scream of wildfowl. All else is now deep pasturage and immense fields bright with stubble, feeding the windmill and the scattered red-brick farms. It is a country to make a farme fat; these are fields to put beef and pudding and ale on a man's tabl Yet it seems to be still haunted by its old desolation. Perhaps the sk which can show a spread of cloud and blue by day, a glitter of star by night, not to be matched elsewhere between Berwick and Penzanc is too big, too masterful, for a man's peace of mind, unless, like s many in the old days, he comes here simply to worship God. Perhap too much is heard of its bitter neighbour, the North Sea, and of win that come from the Steppes. Perhaps it is only because it is a hollo land, which every darkness turns again into a place of spectral marshe and monkish ghosts. Something desolating certainly remains, a whisper not to be drowned by the creaking of the heaviest harvest-wagon The little farms seem lonelier than lighthouses. The roads go on an on, one ruled mile after another, but would never appear to arrive anywhere. The very trains, cautiously puffing along a raised single trac

em to be without either starting-places or destinations, and so wander
ndramatically across the landscape, only heightening, by their passing,
e long silences. The vague sadness of a prairie has fallen upon this
ain of dried marshes. Like a rich man who gives but never smiles,
is land yields bountifully but is at heart still a wilderness.

Somewhere in the middle of this region, a narrow side-road finds
way to a hamlet, made up of about twenty houses, a tiny shop and
ale-house, and then wanders on another mile or so in order to ar-
ve at a house of some size, where it stops, despairingly. This is
sily the largest house in the neighbourhood, a red-brick building in
recognisable style of architecture, and perhaps sixty or seventy years
d. It was built by a strange gentleman from Australia, who had for
ars dreamed of a country mansion, and, once he was installed in it,
oceeded very quietly to drink himself to death. Now, as certain sheds
d newer outhouses, goal-posts and worn fields testify, it is no longer a
untry mansion. It is some years since James Tarvin, M.A. (Cantab.)
arried a woman ten years older than himself, bought with her money
e desirable property known as Washbury Manor, and transformed it
to Washbury Manor School, in which some fifty or sixty boys, pref-
ably the sons of gentlemen, are prepared for the public schools and
hatever else may befall them in this life. Letters from all over the
rld arrive now at Washbury Manor. Men and women in far-distant
ngalows receive little scrawls from there and are very proud and
ring about them. Quite a number of the small boys at Washbury
ve parents who are in India and Africa and such places, and not a
w of the rest have no parents at all but merely guardians, persons
ho are conscientious enough but cannot be expected to discover the
lative merits of all the preparatory schools in England. Not that
ashbury Manor is a bad school; but, on the other hand, it is cer-
inly not one of the best. One visiting uncle, a master in the merchant
rvice, put it to himself and to anybody who might be listening: "It
n't smell right." But he himself was not the kind of person that
r. Tarvin—it is his own phrase—wished to have associated with the
hool. Mr. Tarvin could afford to be contemptuous of such criticism.
e had references from public men, including a Colonial Bishop; some
holarships to the school's credit; pure air and water, a bracing atmos-

phere, perfect sanitation, good playing fields; and a teaching staff o three university graduates, Robert Fauntley, M.A. (Oxon.), Inigo Jollifant, B.A. (Cantab.), Harold Felton, B.A. (Bristol); a matron, Mis Callander, with a diploma in the domestic sciences; and an ex-regula non-commissioned officer, Sergeant Comrie, to take drill and carpentering. Moreover, the health and comfort of the boys are the care of n less a person than Mrs. Tarvin herself, the daughter of the Rev. Georg Betterby. If you are a parent in India, is it not worth cutting thing down a little, depriving yourself of a few holidays in the hills, we wil say, merely to know that your boy is in such hands as these? Term by term, Mr. Tarvin received tribute from the very frontiers of ou Empire, and rarely had he to complain that one of his little iron bedsteads was without its weight of boy.

They are all in bed now, these boys, but they are not all asleep. Mr Felton has already looked in once at the older ones, who may be subject to the vaguely disturbing influences of Saturday night, and ha told them to be quiet. All the other adult persons in the house are tryin to forget the existence of boys. Mrs. Tarvin has commanded the presence of Miss Callander in her drawing-room and is pleasantly occupie in bullying her. Mr. Tarvin himself, having been told to keep ou of the way for half an hour after dinner, has retired to what he call his study, and there, pasty, damp, and breathing heavily, he has cas off both the schoolmaster and the anxious husband and has turne himself into a dozing middle-aged sedentary man, with a weak stomac lulled for a little while into a false peace. Mr. Fauntley has disappeared on one of his mysterious Saturday night excursions. Sergean Comrie is walking over the fields to the village inn, where he is regarde as a rich cosmopolitan character. Mr. Jollifant is in his bed-sitting-room a very small and stuffy apartment not far from the roof, which h prefers to the equally small and stuffy common room because at th moment he is engaged in what he imagines to be literary compositio

He is sitting in a Windsor chair that he has tilted back to a ver perilous angle, and his feet, enclosed in vivid green carpet slippers, ar resting on the sill of the open window. There is about both his attitu and his apparel that elaborate carelessness of the undergraduate, thoug Inigo Jollifant, now in his twenty-sixth year, left Cambridge three yea go. He is a thin loose-limbed youth, a trifle above medium height. is face does not suggest the successful preparatory-school master. It ems rather too fantastic. A long lock of hair falls perpetually across s right eyebrow; his nose itself is long, wandering and whimsical, nd his grey eyes are set unusually wide apart and have in them a urious gleam. He wears a blue pullover, no coat, a generous bow-tie, nd baggy and rather discoloured flannel trousers. He is smoking a diculously long cherry-wood pipe. There is about him the air of one ho is ready to fail gloriously at almost anything. We realise at once at his History, French, English Literature, his cricket and football, e dashing but sketchy. At this moment he is ostensibly engaged in riting an elaborate essay—in a manner of the early Stevenson—en- led *The Last Knapsack*, an essay that he began many weeks ago, in e middle of the long vacation. His right hand grasps a fountain pen nd there is a writing-block on his knees, but never a word does he t down. He blows out clouds of smoke, keeps his feet on the win- ow-sill, and balances his chair at a still more alarming angle.

There is a knock at the door, and then a face looks in, bringing with a flash of eye-glasses.

"Hello! Who's that?" he cries, without turning round. "Come in."

"I'm sorry to trouble you, Jollifant." And the visitor enters.

"Oh, it's you, Felton, is it?" Inigo twists his head round, and grins. Come in and sit down."

Felton is about the same age, but after that there is no further like- ess. He is a pleasant, earnest young man, whose rimless eye-glasses ive him a rather misleading look of energy and alertness. Two years go, he left the University of Bristol, at which he had spent four un- istinguished years, with the determination to do his duty, speak the uth, and be friendly with everybody; and a certain sense of anxiety iscovered in his face, voice, manner, suggests that he has not found easy. Already he is beginning to approach life, or at least every succeeding new manifestation of it, with a slightly halting step and a little refatory cough. He goes warily through the term, occasionally reading arge dull biographies and smoking non-nicotine cigarettes and always greeing with everybody, and then tries to forget his responsibilities in autious foreign travel.

He sat down, then cleared his throat. “Look here, Jollifant, I'm sorr to trouble you.”

“Felton, you do not trouble me,” said Inigo, regarding his companio as if he were a fairly intelligent fox terrier. “It's true I was in the thro of composition. Throes! What damned silly words we use! Have yo ever been in throes?”

“Yes, I see you were,” replied Felton, looking with something lik reverence at the writing-block. He had a deep veneration for literatur so deep that he hardly ever made acquaintance with it. He did n know whether these things that Jollifant was always trying to wri were literature or not, but as usual he was not taking any risks. “It about the washing lists,” he added apologetically.

“The washing lists!” the other cried, in an ecstasy of scorn. “Th is Saturday night, Felton. Think of that, Saturday night! Rememb your orgies at Bristol. Now I'm prepared, as you see, to devote myse in stern seclusion, to Art, searching for the exact phrase. Don't forg that—the exact phrase. Takes a devil of a lot of finding. Again”- and he looked very severely at his visitor and took out the cherry-woo pipe—“I'm prepared to come down from yonder height, as it wer to make merry with you, to exchange ideas, to hear you talk of th old wild days at Bristol. But no washing lists! Not on Saturda night!”

“I see what you mean,” said Felton. “It's an awful nuisance, course. But still, Mrs. Tarvin said——”

Inigo held up his hand. “Her words fall on deaf ears. That woman a gorgon. Tonight, I refuse to believe she exists.”

“Well, we told you what she was like,” said the other. This w his fourth term at the school, and it was Inigo's third. Mrs. Tarvi had been away, for a long rest-cure, during both the previous term so that Felton had known her for about eleven weeks, whereas Inig had only known her for one. “We told you what it would be lik when she came back,” he added, with all the irritating complacenc of the successful prophet.

“What you told me was a mere nothing,” Inigo cried. “You sai for instance, that the food would be cut down a bit when she cam back. It's not been cut down, it's been cut out, clean out. There othing left but the smell, which is worse than ever. Look at tonight's ess!"

"I know. Pretty bad, wasn't it?"

"Shepherds' pie—and no shepherd would ever touch it—for the second me this week, and prunes for the third or fourth! And she calls at a dinner—on Saturday night, too! And there she sits, the shape-ss old guzzler, choking herself right under our noses with cutlets and eam and God knows what. That's the last refinement of torture. she was in the trough with us, groping amongst the minced stuff d prunes and muck, it wouldn't be so bad. But to sit there, letting s see that real food still exists, letting us watch it being converted to that fat of hers, it's simply piling on the insult, it's devilish! If ere's another dinner like that, I shall take sandwiches and chocolate own and eat them in front of her. It isn't that I care so much about ood. My soul, Felton, is like a star and dwells apart, absolutely. But ask you! Can you worthily instruct the young, can you wrestle with e problems of French and History, day after day, on prunes? It n't be done."

"No. I see what you mean, of course. Though, as a matter of fact," e added hesitantly, "I rather like prunes."

"Under which king, Besonian? Speak or die!" Inigo shouted, point-g his pipe-stem at the startled Felton. "He that is not with us is gainst us. Do you ask for prunes, Felton? Do you creep down to at wretched female Tarvin, with your tongue lolling out, and say, Iore prunes. Custard or no custard, more prunes'?"

"Don't be an ass, Jollifant," Felton wriggled. "Besides, I hate shep-erds' pie as much as you do. It'll be like that all the term. I told ou what it would be."

"The whole subject," the other began loftily, "is profoundly distasteful me. Let me read you a sentence or two from *The Last Knapsack*, n essay celebrating—mournfully, you understand—the final extinction f the walking tour. Have you an ear for a phrase, Felton?"

"I don't know. Yes, I think so. But, look here—I'd like to slip p later and hear that—but what about those washing lists?"

Before Inigo could express his opinion again on the subject, there ame a little knock at the door. It was Miss Callander, and she looked as if she had just retreated to her room in a shower of tears an had hastily quitted it in a cloud of powder. She was a distant co nexion of Mr. Tarvin's, a tall, rather plump girl of twenty-seven, wh would not have been noticeable in the nearest town but who seeme in this wilderness almost a beauty, and was certainly too well-favoure to be successful as the school matron, especially since she had been a pointed by Mr. Tarvin during his wife's absence at the beginning the year. She had only spent ten days so far trying to please Mr Tarvin, but already she was beginning to realise the hopelessness the task. For the past four years, she had been engaged off and on a cousin who was out in Egypt. During the last three months, th engagement had been off, but even now she was meditating a letter th would put it on again.

Inigo beamed upon her snub nose, round and rapidly doubling chi and large and rather foolish eyes. They were, he told himself agai the eyes of a stricken deer. "This, Miss Callander," he announce gravely, "is an honour."

"Oh, Mr. Jollifant," she fluttered, "is Mr. Felton here? Oh, I see h is. Mr. Felton, it's about the washing lists——"

"Felton," said Inigo sternly, turning round, "what about those lists?

"That's just what I was asking," Felton began, hastily coming fo ward.

Inigo cut him short with a superb gesture, then smiled at Miss Ca lander with deep tenderness and looked for a moment as if he wer about to pat her hand. "You want them now, I take it?"

"I do, yes. As soon as possible. Mrs. Tarvin's perfectly furious abo *everything*." And her eyes grew and grew and her mouth dropped.

"Say no more," cried Inigo, with an air of immense benevolenc "What man can do, we will do, at least if Felton will condescend t give me a little assistance." He rummaged amongst a mass of paper on his table, found what he wanted, then added: "Forward to th common room. And the motto is 'One for all, and all for one' absolutely. Lead on, Miss Callander. Master Felton, take these paper and shake off that deep lethargy." And off they went, with Mis Callander, giggling a little, in front.

By the time that Inigo had carefully filled and lighted his absur pe and had smiled dreamily for a few moments through the haze of ıoke at his two colleagues, they had completed the lists. "There ›w," he said, as Miss Callander gathered up the papers. "That's done ith. What do we do now? I can't go back to that beastly little room mine and try to write. The mood, Miss Callander, the precious ood, is shattered; the golden bowl, Felton, is broken. I shall try a tle music."

Miss Callander, at the door, turned wide eyes upon him. "How can ›u, though? I mean, where will you go?"

"Aren't you forgetting," he replied with dignity, "that there is an strument—I won't say a piano, but anyhow something in the semance of a piano—in our rotten school-room?"

"Oh, but Mr. Jollifant!" she gave a tiny giggle that was a mixture of ·light and apprehension. "Don't you remember Mrs. Tarvin said it asn't to be used in the evening? She did, didn't she, Mr. Felton?"

"She did, you know, Jollifant," said Felton, with an earnest flash his glasses. "It's a shame, of course, but that's what she said."

"My friends, my old companions in misfortune, I thank you for ese words of warning, but I know nothing of such orders, tyrannical ›mmands which—er—strike at the very roots of liberty. Is thy serınt a dog that he shall not do this thing? The answer is, 'No, dedly not!' I go to play—as best I can, and by George, that's not saying uch because half the keys stick all the time—I go to play, I repeat, ›on the school-room piano. Open your ears—I mean yours, Miss allander, because Felton's, as you can see, are open enough—and they ıall drink in melody and harmony and what's its name—a spot or two counterpoint." And Inigo marched downstairs to the dismal little hool-room, once the drawing-room of Washbury Manor and now a ıeerless huddle of desks and blackboards and yellowing maps. It was ısk now, and he switched on a naked and shivering electric light, ıen walked over to the far corner of the room and seated himself ·fore one of those cottage pianos, with ochreous fronts and mournful ue-white keys, that are designed and glued and varnished for no other laces but miserly institutions. The pedal creaked, the keys stuck to·ther, the tone was sadly tinny, but it was a piano, and music could wrung out of it.

It must be said at once that Inigo's playing, like his French and Hi tory and cricket, was dashing but sketchy. He was not of your co and impeccable executants, delicately phrasing, to the last grace-not their Bachs and Mozarts. His technique was faulty and his taste w worse. He himself thought little of his musical powers, and all his serio thought, his finer energies, were devoted to the composition of elabora prose. In more expansive moments, he saw himself as another Pat or Stevenson. But he was not a writer, and never would be. Try he might, he only succeeded in putting honest words on the rack, lea ing them screaming, though of this he was happily unconscious. H was marked out to be one of those wistful adorers who never ev catch a glance from the Muse. He would never create literature, thoug his life itself might be rich with its scents and flavours. He wou always be one of its failures, though perhaps one of its happy failur that company of humble aspirants—and at heart Inigo was humb enough—who discover more joy in the sight of a sadly botched man script than many a successful writer has found in a row of admir volumes. On the other hand, in his antics at the piano, which h made him so popular at school, at Cambridge, and at odd parties ever where, those antics that he regarded with smiling contempt, there w really a glint of genius. His touch was light, crisp and somehow d liciously comic; he could start the keys into elfin life; and not on could he read easily at sight, and improve as he read, the common s of music, the songs and dance tunes that were so often demand of him, not only could he play by ear and throw in a trick or tw of his own as he played, but he was able to improvise the most amusi little tunes, cynical-sentimental things of the moment, not unlike the other butterfly melodies that wing their way across the world a then perish obscurely, and yet all his own, with a twist in them, som thing half wistful, half comic, in their lilt, that belonged to nobo else. He would play these things until every foot was tap-tappi and many a listener vainly attempting to catch again the deft lit phrases, would be maddened for weeks. But he would only try vari tions of key and manner until at last his ear was satisfied. He nev tried to put them down on paper. It had not occurred to him th the world was being scoured for such tunes; and if it had occurred

m, he would probably have remained indifferent, having a *Last Knap-*
ck still to finish.

For several days an unusually impudent and delicious little tune
ıd been capering at the back of his mind, and now, after some pre-
ninary flourishes, he set out to capture it. He fumbled about for a
w minutes in the key of D major, but then slid into his favourite E
t. The next moment the poor hulk of a piano leaped into life. The
ne was his, and he began toying ecstatically with it. Now it ran
hispering in the high treble; now it crooned and gurgled in the bass;
ıd then, off it went scampering, with a flash of red heels and a tossing
brown curls. There was no holding it at all. It pirouetted round
e room, mocking the desks and blackboards and maps: the air was
ll of its bright mischief. *Rumty-dee-tidee-dee, Rumty-dee-tidee.* But
hy try to describe that little tune or make any mystery of it? All the
orld knows it now, or did yesterday, as *Slippin' round the Corner.*
'hat Inigo played that night was not quite the final melody that be-
me so famous as a song and a dance tune afterwards: the butterfly
as hardly out of the chrysalis yet; but, on the other hand, the lilt
at came out then had not been blared and bleated and howled and
ılgarised in every conceivable fashion, and still had all its enchanting
ockery of things heavy and dull and lifeless. Inigo twisted it this
ay and that, sent little glittering showers of high notes over the
elody, let it sink down in mock despair to the bass, then made it
ng so triumphantly through the school-room that it shattered the place
together and set up in its stead a room that was all long windows
ıd gardens beyond and youth and happy folly. As he did this, Inigo
ughed aloud.

"Mr. Jollifant!" A voice at the door.

Rumty-dee-tidee-dee. This was the best tune yet. It was what Sat-
·day night ought to be. It danced clean over Washbury Manor School
the very first note, cleared the long sullen fields, and then went caper-
g through bright towns that could not be found on any map.

"Mr. Jollifant!" The voice was closer and louder, a screech.

Rumty-dee-tidee. And friends you had never seen before joined hands
ith you, and away you went, past lines of laughing girls. . . .

"Mr. Jollifant!"

And Inigo let his hands fall from the keys and awoke to make th discovery that Mrs. Tarvin really existed and was standing before hi very angry indeed. There followed a moment during which he w able to examine distastefully and in silence her shapeless black figur her grey hair with its odd ribbon in front, her steel spectacles, her lon sallow face that always contrasted so dramatically and repellantly wit her bulk of body.

"Didn't you hear me calling?" she demanded furiously.

"I'm afraid I didn't." Inigo smiled at her in a dazed fashion. Th tune was still running through his head.

"Well, please stop playing at once, at once," cried Mrs. Tarvin. Sh had a trick of repeating phrases, raising her voice the second tim that had been meat and drink to mimics at Washbury for years. " thought it was clearly understood that this piano was not to be playe at all, not at all, in the evening."

"But that's the only time I can play it, absolutely the only time, Inigo replied, quite unwittingly falling into mimicry there and the "And, after all, I give some of the boys music lessons. Music's an extr and—er—we share the profits. And I can't give music lessons unle I play myself sometime, can I?" And he gave her a broad smile.

It was not returned. Mrs. Tarvin had known Inigo only a week, bu already she had begun to regard him as another of her husband's un fortunate appointments. "The music lessons are not important, no important at all," she said coldly. "And in any case, I don't see that is at all necessary that in order to give them, you must play music-ha tunes as loudly as you can when all the boys are in bed, yes, long ag in bed."

"The longer in bed, you know, the deeper the sleep," he began.

"That will do, please, Mr. Jollifant. The rule is that this piano sha not be played, not be played, in the evening." And she swept roun as if she were on a swivel, drew herself up, and marched out.

Inigo followed, whistling softly the night's tune, which now was no only deliciously lilting but also had a certain rebellious note in it. A the head of the stairs, on the way to his room, he met Miss Callande who looked as if she had been standing there, listening.

"Oh, I heard her go down. Did she stop you?"

"She did, she did," he replied. "And just when I was beginning to njoy myself. Did you hear the thing I was playing? A poor thing, ut mine own."

"Was it really? I thought it was lovely. You *are* clever." Then she ropped her voice. "I knew she'd stop you. She's been fearfully cross l the evening and blamed me for all kinds of silly things just after inner, and I really don't know what to do." And she put a hand her cheek and looked at him forlornly.

He took her hand and held it somewhat absent-mindedly. "She inks by keeping us on a low diet—I mean shepherds' pie and prunes —to crush our spirit. But she won't succeed, unless perhaps with Fel-on, who hasn't much spirit anyhow, and likes prunes, or says he does. ut you and I, Miss Callander——" and he completed the sentence by queezing her hand.

She withdrew her hand, though not hastily. "She's really awful, n't she? And only a week of term gone! And weeks and weeks et! What will she be like at the end? Better, perhaps."

"Worse, decidedly worse," said Inigo impressively. "Nine weeks more her—it's unthinkable. Believe me"—and now his voice sank to a arsome whisper—"young as the term is, short as is the acquaintance this gorgon-like female and myself, the fates have already conspired gether and woven a web and laid a train, and very soon—do you know hat will happen here very soon, do you know what there will be?"

Her round eyes and parted lips were sufficient to frame the question. ut Inigo's sense of the dramatic compelled him to wait a few mo-ents. His stare was heavy with doom.

"A bust-up," he said at length, "and a bust-up of the most astounding nd shattering proportions." He gave her another fateful glance, then uite suddenly grinned at her, waved his hand, and went striding down e corridor, whistling his tune, that tune which is perhaps the *leit-otif* of the piece.

II

unday was surprisingly warm for a late September day. It was not, owever, a pleasant and bright warmth, but sulky grey heat, as if the hole place had been shovelled into a huge dim oven. Not a breath stirred the surrounding fields, and all the air inside the school seeme to have been used over and over again. Midday dinner with the boy had been a misery, and Inigo, who had hacked off innumerable slic of boiled beef, had had some greasy traffic with carrots, and had the watched fifteen boys eat tapioca pudding, felt hot, sick and cross.

"I was wrong about there being only two smells here," he announce angrily to Felton, with whom he left the dining-room. "There are tw smells-in-chief, I admit. The smell of boy is the first, of course. An the smell from the kitchen, which must be piled high with decayin bones and drenched in cabbage water, is the second. These are what its name—dominant. But—are you listening, Felton?"

"Not more than I can help, I must say," said Felton, without turnin round. They were now going upstairs, and he was in front. "But go o Jollifant, if it amuses you."

"Ah, Felton, even you feel the iron entering your soul. Where that genial comradeship, that old West Country good nature? And l me tell you that it doesn't amuse me. But what I was going to sa was that it's a mistake to imagine that there aren't other smells her little old smells that live in corners, large vague smells that drift abo the corridors, smells that——"

"Oh, do shut up!" Felton increased his pace. "I've just had dinner

"And you want to wrestle with it in peace? You intend to turn it in an honest bit of Felton? These be mysteries, not to be tampered wi or butted into by the profane."

"I'm wondering what to do," said Felton, standing at the door of h room.

"You're wondering what to do!" cried Inigo, patting him on th shoulder. "Then I say you're lucky. I've got past that. I know that i a warm Sunday afternoon in a smelly school miles from anywhere ar there's nothing to do."

"I think I shall go for a walk."

"What! the same old round—through the fields, Washbury, ov the old bridge, back down the road. Oh no, Felton, you don't mean i

"No, not that way. I thought of going along the dyke to Kinthorpe said Felton, with the air of a modest hero. "You can get tea there, to And he nodded brightly and went into his room.

By the time Inigo had stretched himself across his two chairs and ad lit his pipe, he had an inspiration. He knew that Daisy Callander as free until early evening. Why shouldn't he take her to Kinthorpe r somewhere to tea? She was not perhaps an enthusiastic walker but e could manage that distance. There were times when he half fancied at he was in love with Daisy, though he never could shake off the nowledge that he had only to see half-a-dozen other girls to be quite re he was not in love with her. He knew too that it was impossible spend more than an hour alone with Daisy without flirting with er, because somehow there was nothing else left to do. But then he d no objection to flirting. He had no objection to anything, apart om work and from the baser and more violent crimes, that would ss the time. Languidly, he began to change some of his clothes, eginning with his collar.

There was a knock, and Felton looked in, all neat and shining. The ery sight of his trim brown felt hat, his dreary blue tie, his flashing e-glasses, gave Inigo an awful sense of dullness. A walk with Felton ould be like a stroll across the Gobi Desert.

"You're not coming, Jollifant?"

Inigo gave him a long head-shake. "No, thanks. Some other time hen I'm a stronger and saner man and the wild North-Easter does hatever what's his name—Mr. Kingsley—says it does. But not today."

"I thought not." Felton grinned, rather surprisingly, and withdrew.

"And that," Inigo told himself, "disposes of you, Master Felton. Now r the fair Daisy." And he pulled what seemed to him a fine melo-amatic face and even went over to the glass to see what it really oked like; and hurried on now with his toilet. The fair Daisy seemed irer still, her company for two or three hours a rich prospect. The vful boredom vanished, dispersed by a tiny flame of excitement. He ll to whistling his tune.

A glance through the window showed him a few boys drifting out to the grounds. He cast upon them a look of pity. They would be on assembling for their Sunday crawl, under the direction today of arvin himself. Then they would return to produce, under that same ternal eye, their labourious little weekly letters. Poor infants! What Sunday afternoon they had! But then, just as he was turning away, two larger figures caught his eye. One was Daisy Callander. An her companion, stepping along so briskly, was the wretched and perfidious Felton. He had sneaked down and captured her, and was no taking her out to tea. He was coolly walking off with Inigo's whol afternoon. Inigo stared at their backs, then noticed the daft hat in hi hand, threw the thing across the room, and then stared out again an this time saw nothing—apart from a few idiotic little boys—but a hug and faintly sizzling blankness.

There was just one moment when he might have wept out of shee self-pity. But he gave his hat a kick, muttered words that he ough not to have known at all, sat down and thought of Felton, of Mis Callander, of the whole burst afternoon, and suddenly he chuckle Then he went to call on Fauntley, to borrow from that gentleman' ample store a detective tale.

Fauntley was lolling in his old basket-chair, sucking at a pipe an finishing a whisky and soda. He was a large, sagging man, about fift with formidable eyebrows, a clipped moustache, a heavy jowl, and face empurpled by a host of tiny veins. He was also the only reall able master in the school. Such scholarships as came its way wer snatched by Fauntley, who now and then persuaded himself that boy had ability and promise and so promptly crammed knowledge int him. Why he should ever have come to Washbury Manor or, havin come, should have remained, was a mystery. He seemed to have drifte there out of some queer past. It would be an exaggeration to descri him as that familiar type (in fiction), the brilliant failure; nevertheles he was a sound scholar—infinitely superior to Tarvin himself—and a old Rugger Blue, and he seemed like a man-of-war rotting in som dilapidated little harbour. He jeered at all modern literature (pointin out its mistakes in grammar), but read enormous numbers of detecti stories. Once, and sometimes twice, a week, he disappeared for t whole evening, not returning until very late, and never offered a account of these expeditions. (Inigo periodically shocked Felton suggesting that their older colleague had a mistress in one of the neig bouring villages.) He was very fond of whisky, and when he h taken a sufficient quantity of it he would either express at length h regret that he had never gone into the Church and then proceed t nounce all modern civilisation, or relate with a certain scholarly dis-ıction of phrase, which never appeared in his ordinary conversation, y number of dirty stories. Such was Fauntley. It was impossible dislike him, but it was not difficult to feel that somehow one would better off in some place where he was not. The sight of him fre-ently turned Inigo's attention to the thought of other careers.

'Well, Jollifant," Fauntley growled amiably, putting down his glass, m sorry I can't offer you a whisky, but there isn't any more. I had have that to take the taste of that damned lunch out of my mouth. down."

'I couldn't touch it even if you had any," said Inigo, "not at this ur. I can't drink whisky, somehow, until it's dark. And talking of ıisky, it's my birthday tomorrow."

'How old are you?"

'Twenty-six."

'Good God!" And Fauntley regarded him closely. "Twenty-six. forgotten it existed. But where does the whisky come in?"

'I thought we might celebrate the great event, in the common room er dinner ——"

'If you're thinking of asking our worthy Mrs. Tarvin," said Fauntley who hated her—with a grin, "you'll be disappointed. The Tarvins dining out tomorrow night, I happen to know. They usually do out this time every year."

All the better. Felton will be able to get tight in peace, the deep l treacherous dog. But I want two bottles of whisky for the oc-ion, and I thought you would know where I could get 'em."

Two bottles, eh? Stout feller!" Fauntley rumbled. "The notice is short for me to get 'em for you. I know, though. Comrie's the n. He'll get 'em for you by tomorrow night. You'll make sure ou let him know today."

Good. I'll see the dashing Sergeant, then," said Inigo. "But what omes of him on Sundays?"

You've noticed that fair-haired rather tall maid who occasionally ts at table? Her name's Alice."

And very suitable, too. I know the one you mean. The most om and least ill-favoured of our handmaids. But what about her?"

“Give a message to Alice,” remarked Fauntley blandly, “and it wi reach friend Comrie tonight.”

“Well, well, well!” Inigo cocked an eye at his companion. “You’ pardon me for saying so, Mr. Fauntley——”

“Fauntley, please,” that gentleman put in, “even if you are about t insult me, as I see you are.” But he grinned amiably.

“But you seem to know a devil of a lot about what I might ca the inner workings of this establishment. Now I thought I knew ever thing that’s going on in the place——”

“Not you, Jollifant; you flatter yourself. But anyhow, you try it an see. Give Alice a note.”

“I will. And you’ll join me tomorrow night?”

“Honoured!” grunted Fauntley. They smoked in silence for a minu or two. Then Inigo looked disconsolately out of the window.

“I suppose,” he began, “you wouldn’t like to come out for a wal

“You’re right, I shouldn’t,” the other replied. “And when you’ been here as long as I have, you won’t, either. Besides, I never wa just for the sake of walking. I’ve no doubt Tarvin will let you take t boys out.”

“I’ve no doubt he would. And I’ve no doubt Mrs. Tarvin wou let me soak the prunes for tomorrow. It won’t do. I don’t want live entirely for pleasure. Will you lend me one of your latest mast pieces of crime and detection, something very thin in clues and thi with suspicions?” He began looking about him.

Fauntley yawned. “Take what you like. That one’s not bad, *T Straw Hat Mystery*. It’ll puzzle your tender brains. I’m going to sl for an hour.”

Inigo crawled away with his book and after a few minutes in stuffy little room, he decided to go out and read under one of the f trees at the back of the school. On his way out, he came across of the maids, who promised to give the note he handed her to fair Alice, busy, it appeared, “a-tidying ’erself.” Then he found tree and proceeded to stun the gigantic and silly afternoon with *T Straw Hat Mystery* which he did not finish because he fell asl When he awoke he made a number of discoveries, the most impor of them being that it was past tea-time and much cooler and that vas very stiff and had a slight headache. He limped round to the nain entrance just in time to see Miss Callander and Felton arrive nere, and to notice that they looked dusty and tired and out of spirits. hey were in front, and he let them go without a word.

When Inigo came down, two hours later, to the usual Sunday night old supper, he was feeling hungry. Everybody was there, but only Ir. Tarvin was making an effort to talk. He was a spectacled pompous ttle man, with an unusual and quite misleading expanse of forehead nd a large and shaggy moustache that had been trained to hide what ould undoubtedly be discovered to be a weak little mouth. He had habit of punctuating his speech with a curious explosive sound, which ust be inadequately represented by "chumha." And this was the st thing Inigo heard as he reached the table.

"A—ha, Jollifant!" cried Mr. Tarvin. "Just in time, but only just, the—er—chumha—Scotsman said of his change."

"What Scotsman?" Inigo enquired, with an innocent glance that imediately became less innocent when it moved round to Fauntley, who ised ponderous eyebrows.

"The exact Scotsman is not specified. Chumha." And Mr. Tarvin gan rubbing his hands as he looked at the food before him.

There was the boiled beef, now cold, with beetroot and mashed tatoes. Mrs. Tarvin, however, had a generous plate of cold chicken front of her. Inigo examined it out of the corner of his eye, and en chanced to meet the wide gaze of Miss Callander, who suddenly wered her eyes and was troubled by a delicate fit of coughing. They champed their way through the first course, with Mrs. Tarvin ocsionally addressing a remark to Felton, Mr. Tarvin and Fauntley owing a word at one another, and Miss Callander and Inigo exanging glances now and then across the table. Inigo was convinced it he was suffering from a fit of deep depression. "My heart aches," told himself, poking away at a slippery piece of beetroot, "and a owsy numbness pains. Absolutely." He seemed to have spent nearly his glittering young manhood eating cold meat with these people.

The plates were changed. Before Mrs. Tarvin a dish of crème caramel l a jug of cream were placed. Then came, for the middle of the le and presumably the remainder of the company, the usual butter

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and the wooden slab of cheese—and stewed prunes. They were no even new prunes, Inigo declared angrily to himself; they were old an withered prunes, the very prunes some of them, he was ready to tak oath, that he himself had rejected several days ago, prunes that by thi time he knew shudderingly by sight.

"No, thank you," he cried when the dish came his way. "Not fo me. I don't like prunes. Do you like prunes, Mrs. Tarvin?" he adde impudently. There was an instant hush.

"I don't think I've asked you, Mr. Jollifant," she replied coldly, "t consult me about my taste in food. As a matter of fact, I used to b very fond of prunes, very fond of prunes——"

"I thought I was at one time," Inigo put in recklessly, "but now find I can't stand them."

"But I am not allowed now to eat everything I like," she went o "not allowed at all. I have to be careful, to be very careful."

"Certainly. Very careful. Chumha," said her husband.

"When you are young, you can eat anything, anything at all," sh pursued, "just as sometimes you imagine you can say anything or d anything. Though that is often a mistake, quite a mistake." Sh looked at him steadily through her steel spectacles, then slowly turne to her neighbour. "What were you saying, Mr. Felton?"

"And, of course, Fauntley, you can't—er—chumha—go on spendi public money like—chumha." Mr. Tarvin was rushing in too.

"Did you have a good walk this afternoon, Miss Callander?" Ini roared across the table. "Have some cheese?"

Ten minutes later, the first to leave the table, they strolled out in the garden together. "I must have a cigarette after that," she whispere "Can I have a cigarette, please?"

"You can," said Inigo. "But tell me, did you enjoy your walk wi Felton this afternoon? I must have the answer to that question bef I pour out to you the secrets of my heart."

"Oh, must you! Well, of course I did."

"You did," he said with a stern melancholy. "Then the secrets this heart are ever denied you."

"Well, then——" she hesitated. They were still in the light of t doorway, and she took the opportunity of showing him her large liq orbs. "If you feel like that, I'll confess. I didn't enjoy it much. He's—Mr. Felton's—dullish, isn't he?"

"Felton is very dull. You set my mind at rest. I intended to ask you myself to go for a walk." And he explained at length how he had missed her, then went on: "We'll talk sympathetically under the stars, and tonight I shall call you Daisy."

"Oh, will you? I don't know about that. But listen—you're absolutely in Mrs. Tarvin's bad books. I heard about last night from her; she was furious. And then tonight—those prunes. I thought I should have screamed when you asked her if she didn't like them—the greedy old thing. But really, you'll have to be careful or there's sure to be rouble."

"I am a man," announced Inigo, with a fine Byronic air, "born for rouble. It is only when I'm with you, Miss Call—I mean Daisy, that his restless heart is stilled. Not altogether stilled, mind you, because Beauty itself—er ——"

"Oh, do be quiet," she cried, after waiting in vain for him to tell her what Beauty did. "You're too absurd, and worse than ever tonight. I don't think it's safe being out here with you." Then she lowered her oice, drew closer to him. "But really she is an awful old cat. I'm ure I shall never stick it, I really shan't. She hates me like poison lready."

Inigo murmured sympathetically and drew her arm into his. They walked slowly, close together, over the lawn. The night was large and ool-breathing, deep purple with a faint gold glimmer of stars, full of wl-haunted distances. Inigo, squeezing the arm within his, was already mbracing the night itself, with which he had fallen instantly in love. ut Miss Callander herself, however, was not only shedding certain efects of form and feature, but was even escaping from her own trite rettiness; the night lent her beauty. Could she have borrowed its lence too, she would have been throned even higher in Inigo's nagination.

"I can't do anything right for her," she continued in a rapid whisper. She grumbles at everything. Oh, and do you know she won't let Mr. Tarvin talk to me alone a single minute? She won't, really. She omes flying up at once, saying 'What's this, what's this?' The day before yesterday he came and said something to me just outside the door, and she was at the other end of the garden, miles away, and she saw us and came hurrying up—you wouldn't think she could move so fast, but she can—saying 'What's this, what's this?' It's because he's about ten years younger than she is. She keeps her eye on him all the time. As if I wanted—I mean, a dingy little middle-aged man like James Tarvin—isn't it ridiculous? He's my mother's cousin, you know. She can't forgive me for his having engaged me when she was away."

Inigo let her run on, content to give her arm an occasional squeez and drift into an amorous reverie. They halted near the shrubbery an she grew silent as he glanced from the stars to the dim ivory round o her cheeks. But a noise in the shrubbery made her jump and sh clutched at him. He slid an arm round her. "All right," he muttered "it's nothing." And the arm tightened about her unresisting body.

"I thought—it might be Sturry," she gasped. Sturry was the gardener a long, shambling, melancholy creature who was subject to epilepti fits. These fits were perhaps the most exciting events at Washbur Manor, and at any time when you were taking a class, droning awa at French or History, you might glance through the window and se Sturry falling into a fit outside. All the boys kept their eye on hi whenever they could, hoping that it might arrive at their turn to thro up a hand and cry "Please, sir, Sturry——!", sounding gloriously th alarm.

"What would Sturry be doing mouching about here now?" B while Inigo put the question—and tried to make it sound tender an protective—he could not help thinking that it was useless to ask wh Sturry was doing anywhere and at any time.

"I don't know," she went on, in a tiny troubled voice, "but he's horribly queer, isn't he? He follows me up and down. He comes a stands and stares. I see him staring through the window at me som times. He frightens me. Yes, he does, really."

"Poor girl," he murmured, drawing her closer. "Never mind t loathsome brute. He won't hurt you."

She said nothing but let her hand rest idly against his coat. H large eyes, deep and expressionless, were fixed upon his; her face itse o close now, was a mysterious silent world; everything of her waited. nigo knew that the moment had arrived. He kissed her.

"No, no," she whispered when it was done. "You really mustn't." Her face went back about three inches, but was still tilted towards his. He kissed her again, then again, and held her close while she showered upon his face a host of little kisses. All this they did with a certain ague suggestion of absent-mindedness, as if it was really happening in heir sleep so that they could not be held responsible for it. Inigo felt riumphant but at the same time a trifle foolish. The trouble was, he ad nothing to say. What he was feeling was too strong for the usual dle pretences and yet it was not strong enough to put real words into is mouth. He was rather relieved when she gently disengaged herself nd began to move forward.

Before they had moved ten paces, there was another rustling in the rubbery. "Who's that?" Inigo called sharply. A figure shot out and n past them. Miss Callander gave a little scream, swung round, and ipped heavily over a stone. Inigo, prepared to give chase to the retreatg figure, stopped and found her stretched at full length, whimpering little.

"It's my ankle," she moaned. "I can't get up. I'm sure it's broken." It wasn't, but it was badly sprained, they discovered. Inigo got her ingerly to her feet again, and she put one arm round his neck and owly hobbled back to the house.

Somebody came peering out of the doorway. "Is that you, Daisy?" e called. "And who—chumha—is this?" Mr. Tarvin walked to meet em.

"Miss Callander tripped and fell and sprained her ankle," Inigo plained. And the lady herself, turning a face pale with suffering pon the staring little head master, gave further details.

"We must get you indoors at once. Now lean on me. Chumha. llow me, Jollifant. That's right. Th-a-at's right." And Inigo found mself disposssessed by his superior, who promptly put an arm round iss Callander's waist, drew her own arm round his neck and retained e hand he held, and did it all with a certain gusto. The two of them, affectionately entwined, tottered towards the doorway, and at every ep there seemed to be more of Miss Callander and less of Mr. Tarvin.

They were actually standing, swaying there in the light, and Mr. Tarvin was consoling his burden with soft little chumhas, when footsteps came pattering up the hall. Mrs. Tarvin burst round the corner.

"What's this, what's this?" she flung at them, almost before she could see anything. "James! Miss Callander!"

All three began explaining at once, though Mr. Tarvin, in spite of hi deficiencies, was easily the loudest and most voluble.

"Indeed! Very unfortunate, most unfortunate, though why Miss Callander should choose to wander about in the dark, I can't imagine. Jus take hold of my hand, please, Miss Callander, and see if you can't walk No, James, stand away, stand away. Not at all necessary, quite unnecessary. Now Miss Callander, if you have no objection to leaning upo me. I will find you a cold water bandage. Yes, cold water, absolutel cold. We shall manage very well, quite well in fact, by ourselves, James.' And Mrs. Tarvin moved off, jerking forward her victim and leavin the two men staring at a back that seemed to rustle with indignatio

"Well—er—Jollifant—er—thank you," said Mr. Tarvin; and with a embarrassed chumha he followed, though not too closely, the tw women.

Inigo stared after him, and when they had all disappeared he sti hung about, filling and lighting his pipe, and feeling vaguely as if h had just slipped out of a theatre in which an idiotic play was bein performed. For ten minutes nothing happened at all; nobody cam there was not a sound. Then a noise behind made him turn roun and, with a shock of surprise, he found himself looking at a girl he ha never seen before, quite a pretty girl in bright blue, with cheeks like a apple.

"Please, sir," she began. And then he realised that this was Alice, t maid that Fauntley had mentioned, who was to take his message; b Alice without her uniform, in her best clothes, a free and perhaps sau Alice.

"I took that message, an' Sergeant Comrie 'e says 'e can get them t bottles of whisky tomorrow an' 'e'll let you 'ave 'em in the afternoon a please will you give 'im the money then. An' 'e says," she continu breathlessly, "will Old Rob Roy do?"

"Will Old Rob Roy do what?" Inigo enquired solemnly. "I do know because I've never met the old gentleman. But he sounds as if e could do almost anything.”

She giggled, and then opened her eyes wide at him. “It's the name f the whisky, you know it is. An' will it do, 'e says?”

“Couldn't be better,” said Inigo heartily, though he had never heard f it before. “It's for my little birthday party tomorrow night,” he dded in a confidential whisper. “Suppose I give you the money, could ou pass it on and take the bottles in for me? Just, you know, as a pecial birthday favour.” Alice could, and he counted out the twenty-ive shillings, gave it to her, then found another half-crown. “You know, think Comrie's a very lucky man. I didn't recognise you, you're such tremendous swell in your Sunday clothes. I hope Comrie appreciates hem.”

“Oh, I don't go with 'im every time 'e likes,” cried Alice, tossing her ead. “I likes to please myself about that. Sometimes I goes out by yself.”

“Yes,” said Inigo vaguely, for this was an invitation to which he did ot feel he could respond. Nevertheless, he beamed upon her. “I can ee that you're a proud girl, Alice. But I hope you're not too proud to ccept this for taking my message.” And he pressed the half-crown to her palm and folded her fingers round it. His glance fell upon er ripe and smiling mouth. The night was still working obscurely side him. There was something very inviting about those generous ps.

“Ah, Jollifant,” said a voice behind him. Inigo jumped. Mr. Tarvin ad returned.

“Alice here,” said Inigo blandly, “has been taking a message for me, aven't you Alice?”

“Yes, yes, of course, one of the maids. Alice. I didn't recognise who was. Chumha.” And he looked at her with such interest that Inigo ade a note of it, for the benefit of Fauntley.

“I was just saying the same thing myself,” Inigo pursued. “I was say-g that she was so smart in her Sunday clothes—they are your Sunday othes, aren't they, Alice?”

“Let me see,” Mr. Tarvin reflected, “you've been here how long now?” e seemed to be in no greater hurry to get rid of her than Inigo was.

And it was this last query, keeping him staring there another minu that was his undoing.

"Oo!" cried Alice.

The two men turned round. Too late! Mrs. Tarvin was upon the "What's this, what's this? Really now I can't understand, I really ca understand ——"

"I've just been—er—chumha ——"

"Good night, everybody." Inigo left his unhappy head master explain everything. When he reached the landing that led to his o room, he ran into Felton.

"What have you been doing all night, Jollifant?"

"There are times, Felton," said Inigo, solemnly shaking his he "when the sight of your bright innocent face, those unstained eye-glass that cherubic mouth, the wild yet shy gambols and romps that ha brought so many happy hours to Bristol and even Clifton ——"

"Oh, do shut up about Bristol!"

"The very pink that now mantles your youthful cheek—all th things, Felton, at times, I say, go to my heart and there lay a what's name—a heavy burden, and I tell myself that Washbury Manor much to answer for. This is one of the times, Felton. I grieve for y Good night."

III

"Having drunk your health, Jollifant," said Fauntley, his fingers closi round the bottle of Old Rob Roy, "I will now proceed to give you little good advice." He spoke in that unusually careful and dignif manner often found in men who have just accounted for half a bo of whisky and are busy pouring out the other half.

This was Monday night and the little birthday party. The revel had the place to themselves, for the Tarvins were dining out and Callander had retired early, to rest her ankle. Indeed, the tiny c mon room, which had sufficient haze of smoke and reek of Old Roy to be a highland den, seemed to have removed itself altogether f Washbury Manor. Perhaps one of the trio, Felton, can hardly described as a reveller. He did not like whisky and was secretly troub all the time by the thought of what his companions might say or nder its influence, but being a good-natured and gregarious youth, he id his best, by drowning his tots of liquor in soda water and then king blind gulps at the stuff, by smoking quite a number of his non-icotine cigarettes, by laughing whenever the others laughed, to be one the party. And perhaps Fauntley, who was there to deal justly with e Old Rob Roy, did not quite succeed in revelling. With Inigo him-lf, however, there can be no such reservations. He was there to do e honours, to drink with and beam upon his companions in misfor-ne, to forget, to expand. He was not really very fond of whisky but ready he had had a great deal more of it than he was accustomed to, d now his lock of hair seemed longer and more troublesome than ual and his smile a trifle broader, his gestures had a certain amplitude d nobility, and his spirit, discovering again the enchanted richness of e, was taking wing.

“But before I give you this advice,” Fauntley continued, “I should like ask you a few questions, in what is—you must understand, Jollifant a purely friendly spirit. No discourtesy is intended.” He brought out ese remarks with the care of a pleading K.C. In a few more glasses' ne, he would stand at the familiar crossroads, being compelled to go e way and discuss his lost position in the Church and the decay of vilisation or to go the other way and talk bawdy. At the moment, wever, he was still free and so was enjoying his capacity to choose, velop, expand, any theme. “My first question is this. Have you any oney?”

“About two pound ten,” replied Inigo.

“No, not actual money, cash in hand, but means, income, capital.”

“Oh, that! I've a private income of about sixty pounds per annum, rived, gentlemen, from investments. One is the Western Gas Com-y, and the other the Shuttlebury Bag and Portmanteau Corpora-. I may add that the Bags and Portmanteaus are a bit rocky.”

Very well. You can't live on that, can you? Still, it's something,” Fauntley, examining the stem of his pipe with great gravity. “My t question is this. What about your people? Have you any expec-ions? Have you anybody dependent on you?”

“Neither.” Inigo took up his glass. “I am, my friends, a man without ily. You see before you a Norphan. As a matter of fact, I've an uncle—he's in the tea trade and lives at Dulwich—who sort of helpe to bring me up until I left Cambridge. I was staying with him durin the Long. He's a pleasant old stick and the only man I know what sti wears a straw hat."

"I know a man who wears one in winter," Felton put in modestl

"Have another drink, Felton," said Inigo, pushing across the bottl "In winter, too, eh? There's more in you than meets the eye. An al the-year-round-bounder, eh? I must tell my uncle that; he'll be furiou But where does this lead us, to what dark clue, Fauntley?"

"My advice to you, Jollifant, is this. Get out of this place. You' only wasting your time. You don't like it, and I don't think it lik you." Fauntley emptied his glass and relit his pipe. "I don't mean to another school. There are plenty of prep schools better than Was bury, much better, and there are some worse. I've known one or tw a damned sight worse."

"You stagger me," cried Inigo.

"Well, I don't know," said Felton, "I've heard of schools——" B what he had heard was never revealed because his troubled piping w completely drowned by Fauntley's heavy bass.

"When all's said and done, these prep schools are not your damn Board or Council schools or whatever they call 'em now—reading a writing factories. A gentleman can still teach in 'em. Don't for that, you youngsters. These are the only places left for a gentlema

"No doubt," observed Inigo sadly. "But it's pretty ghastly being gentleman, isn't it?"

"It's nearly played out," said Fauntley. "And so, by the way, is t bottle. There's another somewhere, isn't there, Jollifant?"

"There is, and I'll open it. But what am I to do when I get ou

"Well, of course, that's your affair," said Fauntley, who seemed think that up to this time the conversation had been on some pu question, and had all the appearance of a man who had successf settled it. "I don't pretend to know about these things. But you w a little, don't you? Why don't you become a journalist?"

"Because I was born at least thirty years too late," replied Inigo. "N if I'd been writing in Henley's time——"

"Good feller, Henley!" Fauntley ejaculated this with such an hat the wondering Felton, who only knew Henley as the man who was aptain of his soul, thought the two must have been at Oxford together.

"I could have done something," Inigo pursued wistfully. "It's too ate now, though. Why, I'm working at a thing now, an essay on *The Last Knapsack*—about walking tours, you know—that Henley would ave jumped at. But I'm absolutely certain," he added, with prophetic ruth, "that there isn't a paper in the country would take it now. No, 've thought about that, and it's useless. Some day, perhaps, I may——" And he finished the sentence with a graceful gesture; that, no doubt, f a man accepting or refusing several wreaths of laurel.

"That's no good then," said Fauntley so heartily as to be almost brutal. What else is there? Of course you're devilish clever at the piano—'ve heard you—always reminds me of a feller who was up at Merton n my time. He was the cleverest feller I ever heard at a piano, could lay and sing you anything, though I can't say it ever did him any good n the long run. The last time I heard of him, he was seen opening ysters—professionally, I mean—in a bar in Sydney. Still," he conceded, you might be able to make something out of it."

"Some fun, that's all. But, by jingo! I concocted a gorgeous little tune he other night—Saturday, it was. Did you hear it, Felton? It's about he best I've struck." And he began whistling his little tune, and it ounded better than ever.

"Let's have it, Jollifant," said Fauntley.

"What do you mean? Go down to the school-room?"

"I do. A quick one all round——" and he tipped some Old Rob Roy nto the three glasses—"then some music."

"Right you are!" Inigo drank his approval.

"But look here," Felton began, signalling an alarm with his eye-glasses.

"No time to look there, Felton," said Inigo sternly. "Drink up. He's vorried because the Tarvin stopped me on Saturday," he explained to auntley.

"She's out," said Fauntley, "and I don't know if it would matter if she veren't." And he drank confusion to the woman. "Bring your glasses nd a syphon. I've got the bottle." And Felton, sorely troubled, followed them down.

"A little one before you begin," Fauntley suggested, and so Inigo had another drink. He had never seen a keyboard that looked so invitin He felt he could do anything with it, any mortal thing. He liked thi phrase so much that he found himself repeating it: "Any morr-t thinggg." It gave him a feeling of joyous confidence. *Terum, perum perum—pum—pum, trrrum.* That was the fine opening flourish. No he was sliding into his tune, gently, gently at first. *Rumpty-dee-tidee-d* —it was undoubtedly better than ever—*rumpty-dee-tidee.* He playe it through softly.

"Is that it?" asked Fauntley, out of a golden mist of Old Rob Ro

"It is. D'you like it?"

"Well, I don't pretend to have any ear, but it seems to me absolute first-rate, Jollifant, far better than most of the things you hear nowaday You ought to get somebody to print that. *Rumty-dee.* No, I haven quite got it. We'll have it again in a minute. Here's luck!"

Inigo emptied his glass in reply, then began playing again. He we through half a dozen tunes of his own, and Fauntley tapped his fe and Felton nodded his head, though a trifle dubiously.

"Bravo!" cried Old Rob Roy, speaking through Fauntley. "You' got a touch, you know, Jollifant, a wonder-ful touch. And a tale distinctly a talent."

"You heard those tunes of mine?" said Inigo, wheeling round e citedly. "I have a phrase describing 'em, thought of it the other da They're like a family of elves in dress suits. How's that?"

"Not bad," said Fauntley, "but I'd rather have the tunes. Let's ha that first one again."

And Inigo, deciding that as a phrase-maker he was above the hea of his present company, went back to his *Rumpty-dee-tidee-dee,* and th time he crashed it out fortissimo, so that instead of slyly hinting th you might slip round the corner, the tune now loudly defied anybo or anything that would keep you in your place and ended by fai hurling you round the corner. Fauntley kept time with his glass the little table near the piano, and even Felton tapped his feet. Th was such a noise in the room that a car might have been driven up the front door, the door might have been opened without anybody the being any the wiser.

Concluding with a final crash, Inigo sprang to his feet.

"And that's the tune," he cried, "that the wretched Tarvin woman, at putter of prunes on other people's plates, stopped me playing the her night."

"A damned shame!" growled Fauntley. "She's an old spoil-sport."

"Yes, I don't like her much, I must say," added Felton, now throwing scretion to whatever winds Old Rob Roy may have known.

"Like her, Felton! I loathe her. What a pair they make! I've not ld either of you yet what happened last night." And he plunged citedly into an account of the proceedings of the night before, begin- ng with Mr. Tarvin's discovery of Miss Callander outside the door. s soon as he had brought Mrs. Tarvin on to the scene for the first ne, Inigo's narrative began to lose its grasp upon truth until at last was an Arabian Night of embarrassed "chumhas" and "what's this, hat's this?"

"Oh, damned good, damned good!" Fauntley was rolling in his chair. don't believe a word of it, Jollifant," he roared. "But it's damned od."

"Honest truth, I assure you!" Inigo roared in reply. He was sitting wn now and the three of them had their heads together. "So she me along, crying 'what's this, what's this, what's this? I can't under- nd, I really can't understand. Now tell me, tell me, tell me.' 'Well, u see,' said poor old Tarvin, 'you see—chumha.' 'No, I don't see umha. I don't see chumha at all,' she screamed back at him. 'I see u talking to a girl, a girl, quite young, a young girl. I cannot have u talking to a girl, cannot have it at all, not at all.'" Inigo stopped r a moment, exhausted.

"She never said that, though," Fauntley roared again. "You can't l me she said that."

"No, I know she didn't." Inigo sprang up, flung back his wandering k, then slapped his knee. "But don't you see I'm giving you the soul the thing, absolutely? That's what she meant."

"Is it, is it indeed?" It came in a scream of rage from the door at other end. There stood Mrs. Tarvin.

The shock, the sight of her standing there, coming at the end of a g crescendo of excitement, cut the last binding thread of self-control in Inigo. Up jumped Old Rob Roy himself to answer. "How now you secret, black, and midnight hag!" he thundered down the room.

"What!" she shrieked, and swept forward, followed by her husban "What did you say? You're a drunken rowdy. I've never been s insulted in all my life. And by one of our own masters! I've neve heard, never never heard, of such a thing. The school-room a taproom mimicry and insults and abuse! Why don't you say something, sa something, James? Tell him to leave the place at once."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Jollifant," said Mr. Tarvin sternly as he could. "You're—er—drunk. Chumha."

Fauntley was trying to rouse himself. "He's a bit tight, Tarvi Birthday. Get him to bed."

"Pardon me, Fauntley, but I'm perfectly sober," said Inigo. "And refuse to be got to bed."

"Is this—this—this fellow to stay here?" demanded Mrs. Tarvin her husband, in a passion.

"Of course not. Expect resignation," muttered Mr. Tarvin.

"He must leave in the morning, in the morning. I won't have hi here a moment longer, not a moment." Her rage seemed to increase.

"Quite understand. Chumha. Disgraceful business," her husba muttered again. "Rather awkward, though, to leave in the mornin

"And why, pray?"

"Well, to begin with, must have term's notice. Chumha."

"In short," said Inigo, making a sweeping gesture but speaking qu distinctly, "if I leave in the morning you must pay me a term's sala Fifty-two pounds. A mere pittance, but mine own."

"I don't care about that," cried Mrs. Tarvin, looking at Inigo as he were a kind of reptile, then glaring at her husband. "I won't ha him here any longer, not a day, not a day. I knew what it would from the first, from the very first. Another of your ridiculous appoi ments. I'll have him out tomorrow whatever it costs."

"Very well, my dear," said Mr. Tarvin, who knew only too well wh all the money came from. "We will have to manage somehow—chum —for a week or so. You will—er—have your term's cheque in the mo ing, Jollifant, and leave us then."

"I should think so indeed, I should think so," cried Mrs. Tarvin.

his moment, Inigo was trying to close the lid of the piano and not ucceeding very well because he had failed to notice that a large match-ox had been left on the keys. "Don't touch that piano, don't touch ," she went on. "Take yourself off to bed and get ready to leave in e morning."

"I am not leaving in the morning," Inigo announced loudly.

"Certainly you are."

"Oh no, I'm not. I'm leaving tonight. Now."

"Don't be an ass, Jollifant," said Fauntley, putting a hand on his arm. You can't leave tonight. It's impossible."

"Not at all impossible. An excellent idea."

"There's no train," Fauntley pursued. "You couldn't go anywhere."

"I can walk," said Inigo triumphantly. "I can put a knapsack on my ack and walk. I leave tonight. It's not raining, is it? Is it raining, elton?"

"I—er—I don't know," stammered poor Felton, who had been busy ying to efface himself for the last five minutes.

"I'm surprised, very surprised, at you, Mr. Felton," said Mrs. Tarvin verely. "I expected better things of *you*."

"Felton was dragged into this," said Inigo, "because I told him it was y birthday. Felton can't resist a birthday, can you, Felton? Mr. arvin, I'm leaving tonight and so I will ask you to make my cheque ut now." He spoke very slowly and carefully.

"This is—er—chumha—ridiculous, Jollifant. You'll have to go, of urse, but still—er—chumha."

"Let him go, let him go," cried Mrs. Tarvin. "We shall only be ared trouble in the morning. I don't see why we should have to make ut cheques at this time of night, but the sooner he goes the better, and he has to sleep in a ditch, it's no concern of ours, no concern at all. r. Felton, kindly remove these filthy glasses and open all the windows. his place is disgusting, disgusting." She turned a still quivering back pon them and marched out.

Quarter of an hour later, Inigo had his cheque in his pocket and had acked his immediate necessaries in a knapsack. "I'll tell you where to rward the trunk and the suit-case," he said to Fauntley, who was looking on. "Keep an eye on these things, will you, until I want them?

It must be twelve, isn't it? And I don't feel a bit sleepy and it's a fin night and I've finished with this place and I needn't look for anothe for some time and I don't give a damn. I call it a glorious exit."

"And I call it damned silly," said Fauntley, grinning. "And Go knows how we shall manage those classes next week, or what sort o blighter the agencies will rake up for Tarvin. But good luck, Jollifan Here, there's a spot of whisky left. We'll have a parting drink."

They were having it when Felton looked in. "You're really goin then? I told Miss Callander you were. She looked out of her bedroo and asked me what was the matter. Can I do anything, Jollifant?"

Inigo shook him by the hand. "Not a thing but say good-bye. commend your soul to the Eternal Verities, Felton, though I haven the least notion what they are. We shall meet again sometime, I fe it in my bones." By this time, he had put on a raincoat and swung h knapsack over it, found his hat and a fierce ash stick, and was ready t go. Fauntley went out with him. As they passed her door, Miss Ca lander looked out. "I'll be with you in a minute," Inigo whispered t Fauntley, and stayed behind.

"You really are going?" Miss Callander, in her dressing-gown, looke rather like a pink rabbit. She opened her eyes as wide as possible an her mouth hardly at all.

"I'm sacked and I'm going."

"You crazy boy!" she whispered. "I'm awfully sorry. It will be m turn next, very soon, and really I shan't be sorry, I really shan't."

Inigo looked at her steadily, with a small friendly smile. "I shou try Egypt if I were you."

She nodded confusedly. "I've just been—been writing there. O but—I've got something for you." She produced a little packet. "I only some biscuits and chocolate, but I don't suppose you've got anythi to eat with you, have you? And you'll get awfully hungry."

Inigo was really touched. It came to him in a flash that nobody h done anything like this for him for years. He had been living almo entirely in a world of services for money. "Daisy Callander," he cri softly, "you're a brick. I'm tremendously grateful. I'd forgotten ho hungry I should be in an hour or two."

"Where are you going?"

He stared at her. "Do you know, I'd entirely forgotten that. I've idea where I'm going. I shall just walk and walk. Good-bye—and od luck!" He held out his hand.

She slipped her hand into his instead of shaking it. Then she raised r face a little. "Good-bye," she said, rather tearfully.

He realised that she wanted him to kiss her. Strangely enough, ough he had never liked her more than he did at this moment, he did t want to kiss her. But he did kiss her, gently, then gave her hand a al squeeze, and hurried downstairs to find Fauntley waiting for him the front door.

"Fine, but coldish and black as pitch," said Fauntley. "In an hour u'll wish you'd stayed here and gone to bed. You'd better change ur mind now."

"Not I," said Inigo, peering out. "I like the smell of it. I'll push on, terborough way."

"You're a young ass, Jollifant."

"And I'll let you know what happens to me, Fauntley, give you an tline of my adventures till we meet again."

"I repeat, Jollifant, you're an ass. And if I were twenty years younger, should come with you."

Two minutes later, Fauntley had bolted the door and Inigo had rned out of the grounds into the lane, walking quickly westward.

Chapter Four

MR. OAKROYD ON T'ROAD

I

When Mr. Oakroyd dashed out of the house and hurried do Ogden Street with his little basket trunk in one hand and bag of tools in the other, he had no idea where he was going. He o knew he was going somewhere, that night, at once. The thought taking a train at such a late hour somehow frightened him, for seemed the act of a desperado. He had only once taken a train at ni in all his life and that had been in the company of six hundred ot citizens of Bruddersford. He saw himself being arrested at the tic office.

"Na Jess!" somebody cried.

"Na lad!" he called back, hurrying on and wondering who it w He walked so quickly now and was so busy with his thoughts t outside "T'Mucky Duck," turning into Woolgate, he ran full tilt i somebody, a big man.

"'Ere, weer the 'ell are yer coming to!" shouted the big man. T he saw who it was. "Eh, it's Jess Oakroyd. Weer yer going, Jess?"

"Off for me holidays, Sam," replied Mr. Oakroyd, slipping away leaving the big man staring.

These little encounters seemed to make the situation more desper It was then that he thought of Ted, Oglethorpe's nephew, who had last night that he could have a trip whenever he wanted one. Load at Merryweather's in Tapp Street, up to eleven o'clock or after, then going somewhere down South—where was it?—Nuneaton. T was it. He felt immensely relieved at the thought that Ted would him a lift down South. It would probably mean sitting on the b at the back of the lorry all night, but this prospect did not daunt h e rather liked the idea of jolting his way out of Bruddersford in this shion.

Tapp Street, near the centre of the town, is a short street full of offices d warehouses, and any time after seven it looks dark and is almost serted. There was only one sound now to be heard in the street, but sooner had Mr. Oakroyd, turning the corner, heard it, than he ickened his pace at once. It was the sound of a lorry engine, an gent throb-throb. As Mr. Oakroyd trotted up towards it, the engine rst into a roar. In another minute the lorry would be off. “Hi!” ied Mr. Oakroyd, and fairly ran now. It was quivering with im-tience.

“Here Ted,” shouted Mr. Oakroyd, “I'm coming wi' yer.”

A face he could not see distinctly looked from the driver's seat. “Less ise, mate,” it said hoarsely. “An' if yer coming, yer'll have to get on the back. There's only room for two 'ere in front. 'Urry up. Take or leave it.”

This was certainly not Ted's voice, but Mr. Oakroyd did not trouble s head about that. “All right,” he gasped, and hoisted his two bags the back. Fortunately the lorry was not fully loaded and there was om at the sides, where the tarpaulin-covered bales or pieces did not me to the very edge. But he had still to hoist himself up, and he d not succeeded in doing this when the lorry started, so that he was rried several yards down Tapp Street with his legs swinging in mid-r. It was only by a tremendous effort that he pulled himself over the de, and even then he barked his shins and knees. After resting a inute or two, he contrived to remove himself and his two bags to here there was space enough between the backboard and the tarpaulin le for him to sit down and make himself snug.

It was grand. They bumped and rattled on at a surprising pace, and r. Oakroyd in triumph watched the Bruddersford warehouses and ops and trams start up, quiver, and then retreat. With great dexterity, filled and lighted a pipe of *Old Salt,* which had itself somehow hieved a new and adventurous flavour, and smoked it with a real old ltish air, like a man on the lookout to make the landfall of Cape ambodia. Through valedictory puffs of smoke, he saw Bruddersford self slide away, the hills rise up, a vague blackness, the street-lamps of distant and ever-retreating suburbs take on the shape and glitter of co stellations. Other towns, Dewsbury, Wakefield, closed round him a then shook themselves off again. It was colder now, and he shiver a little in his thin mackintosh. He was still warmed, however, by feeling of triumphant escape. He didn't care where they landed in t morning. They were going on and on, and it was grand.

Then there came a great moment. He had been dozing a little b was roused by the lorry slowing down, sounding its horn, then swin ing round into a road that was different from any they had been on far. It was as smooth and straight as a chisel, and passing lights show him huge double telegraph posts and a surface that seemed to slip aw from them like dark water. Other cars shot past, came with a bla and a hoot and were suddenly gone, but the lorry itself was now trav ling faster than he thought any lorry had a right to travel. But at o place they had to slow down a little, and then Mr. Oakroyd read t words painted in large black letters on a whitewashed wall. *The Gre North Road.* They were actually going down the Great North Roa He could have shouted. He didn't care what happened after this. H could hear himself telling somebody—Lily it ought to be—all about “Middle o' t'night,” he was saying, “we got on t'Great North Roa Here was another town, and the road was cutting through it like knife through cheese. Doncaster, it was. No trams now; everybo gone to bed, except the lucky ones going down South on the Gre North Road.

“By gow!” he cried, “this is a bit o' life, this is. Good old Te Good old Oglethorpe! I owe him summat for this.” And he yearn with gratitude towards the thought of Ted and his companion at t wheel, settled himself as snugly as he could, and in spite of his excit ment soon began to doze again.

He might have fallen fast asleep had he not been wakened by a ve curious incident. There was somebody shouting. The lorry made grinding noise, seemed to hesitate. “Hey there!” came the shou “Wait a minute, wait a minute.” It was a policeman. The lorry ha passed him now, but he came running after it. There was a roar, fearful rattling, and the lorry rushed on, obviously being pressed to as hard as it could. The policeman dropped behind, but he was ne ough for Mr. Oakroyd to see him. He stood still but moved his nd. Above the din of the lorry sounded the policeman's whistle, that rribly urgent shrilling. Again and again it sounded, but now they re rapidly gaining speed and soon left it far behind. Mr. Oakroyd, king and listening still, his face above the rattling backboard, was rtled and amazed. The whistle rang in his ears yet, asking questions. hat did it mean? What was Ted up to? Why had the policeman ed to stop them? Had they been going too quickly? This was the vious explanation but somehow it did not satisfy himself. There was nething very queer about this. He was quite awake now.

Having decided to act queerly, the lorry did not return to normal haviour. It raced along at a monstrous pace, jolting Mr. Oakroyd til he was breathless, bruised and terrified, and several times it seemed danger of crashing into other cars, only swerving at the last moment d being followed by angry shouts. Mr. Oakroyd had begun to won- whether it would be possible to creep along to the front to yell at d, ask him if he had gone crazy, when suddenly the lorry swung und, throwing him against the backboard, and turned down a nar- v side-street. It went several miles down this road at the same mad ce, and the jolting was now worse than ever. Then it turned again, s time into a road still narrower, a winding lane full of ruts and over- nging branches of trees that seemed to miss them by inches, and now was compelled to slow down to what seemed in comparison a mere wl. Mr. Oakroyd was able to take breath, look about him into the sterious night, and think a little. He had hardly collected his ughts, however, before the lorry, arriving at a tiny open space where s road met another, came to a standstill, much to his relief. It was right going down the Great North Road in the middle of the night, t this had been a bit too much. He rose, gingerly, to his feet.

'Where's that screw driver?" he heard from the front. It was the ce of the man who had spoken to him in Tapp Street.

t went on: "That's right. Better stay 'ere, Nobby, and gimme the ice if yer see anybody." The man was climbing out.

'D'yer think 'e took it?" asked the other.

Mr. Oakroyd was astonished. That wasn't Ted's voice. Ted was not the lorry at all, then.

“Whether ’e ’as or ’e ’asn’t, I’m risking nothing,” said the first ma “There’s no going straight through now, and ’owever far we go roun this lorry’s got to ’ave another bloody number before we see dayligh ’Ere, Nobby, yer might as well get down. Chuck us them numb plates.”

At this point Mr. Oakroyd thought that he might as well get dow too. He fell rather than climbed out—for he was stiff and shiverin with cold—and tottered round to the front, rubbing his hands.

“ ’Ello, ’ello!” cried the first man, staring. “I’d fergotten all about ye mate. You’ve ’ad yer liver and lights shaken up all right, ’aven’t yer

“I have an’ all,” replied Mr. Oakroyd grimly. “But where’s Ted

“Ted? Ted? Oo the ’ell’s Ted?” demanded the other. And the he stepped forward and peered into Mr. Oakroyd’s face. “And oo t ’ell are you, anyhow? ’Ere, Nobby, this isn’t ’im.”

“Isn’t it?” said Nobby, stepping forward too. He was a large ma well muffled up, with a very small hat crammed down on his hea It was his turn now to stare at Mr. Oakroyd. “No begod, it isn’t all. It’s a stranger. He’s a stranger to me, Fred.”

“And to me. ’Ere, wot’s the idea?” he demanded fiercely.

“Ar d’yer mean wot’s the idea?” asked Mr. Oakroyd valiantly.

“I mean wot’s the bloody idea, that’s wot I mean,” he repeated wit passion.

Mr. Oakroyd felt very uncomfortable indeed. “Well, this is Te Oglethorpe’s lorry, isn’t it?”

“No, it isn’t Ted anybody’s lorry, this isn’t. It’s our lorry, this is, an I want ter know wot yer doing on it.” This Fred was a hoarse-voic truculent sort of fellow, one of those who pushed their faces close yours when they talked, and at every succeeding word he seemed grow angrier.

Mr. Oakroyd might feel uncomfortable, and indeed he could n help feeling a little lost and forlorn, miles from anywhere in the nig as he was, in the company of two fellows whom he now suspected be downright rogues; but he was anything but a coward and he h his own share of pugnacity. “I come on it because I thought it b longed to a friend o’ mine,” he said sturdily. “And you said nowt stop me neither when I said I were coming.”

"I took yer for somebody else," said Fred sullenly.

'And I took you for somebody else," said Mr. Oakroyd. "So that's it."

'Well, yer came and yer 'ere and now yer'd better be moving on." nd Fred turning his back on Mr. Oakroyd, began whistling.

'Half a minute, though," said Nobby; "we'd better have a bit of a k about this." And he beckoned Fred, and the two of them walked ay and began whispering. Mr. Oakroyd overheard several phrases, which one—"knows too much"—was repeated more than once by bby.

'If you want to change these numbers," Mr. Oakroyd called out, t on wi' it. It's nowt to do wi' me."

'Not so loud, not so loud," said Fred, returning with his companion. ll right, Nobby, I'll get on with it. You can do the patter. Only God's sake keep it quiet." He busied himself with the front number te.

Nobby brought his large mysterious bulk close to Mr. Oakroyd, and en he spoke his accents were bland and conciliatory. "And where ght you be making for, Mister?"

Well, you see, I thowt I'd move down South for a bit," explained . Oakroyd. "Leicester way p'raps. I've been there afore an' I'm of a job and so I thowt I'd try a move."

Going at a funny time, wasn't you?" pursued Nobby, still blandly with a certain significant emphasis.

Ay, I was moving late—like you. But this 'ere friend o' mine had l me he'd be there late, you see, at Merryweather's i' Tapp Street."

That's all right, Nobby," grunted Fred, bending over his task. "Saw urther down and it got off about ten minutes afore we did."

Quite so, quite so," said Nobby smoothly. Then he lowered his ce. "The fact of the matter is, Mister—I dare say you thought one two things about this job was a bit queer like, didn't you?—but the of the matter is, me and Fred here hasn't got a licence—driving nce, you know—between us, and so we're having to do a bit of lging."

It's no business o' mine," replied Mr. Oakroyd reflectively, "but I 't see how changing t'numbers is going to help you if you haven't got a licence. You can be pulled up, just t'same. Still, you know yo own business."

Nobby made a smacking noise with his lips, perhaps to suggest th he was thinking deeply. "It's no good, Mister," he said at length, can see it's no good trying to deceive you. You're too smart for th Well, it's like this." And now he whispered with a most engagi conspiratorial air. "A genelman of my acquaintance is a partner in firm. Right. He has a bit of a barney with the other two partne decides to have a split. Right. He takes so much stock, they take much. But he can't get his, they won't part. It's his but they wo part till they're forced. He comes to me and asks me to get it away f him. Once it's gone, all right, no trouble. It'll save a law job. Th can't get at him 'cos it's his stuff, but they could get at us for getti it out of the warehouse. We knew that, me and Fred, when we to it on, but we're sportsmen, we are, and we'll take a bit of a risk obligi a friend, we will."

"Ay," said Mr. Oakroyd, who did not believe a word of all this. " you're keeping it quiet like. And who did you think I was?"

"Well, you see, Mister, there was a feller in the warehouse we'd g to know," began Nobby hopefully.

"Ay," said Mr. Oakroyd, cutting him short. He had suspected so time that he had travelled with a lorry-load of stolen goods, probab pieces of expensive cloth. The trick had been worked before in Bru dersford, and he knew all about it. At the moment he did not feel a particular loyalty towards the manufacturers of his native town, wh warehouses could all be rifled for all he cared, so that his conscience d not trouble him overmuch, but at the same time it was not easy to f comfortable in such company and he thought that the sooner he left the better. Yet when he considered the chill darkness, the lonely pla his own position, any company seemed better than none for the ti being.

Fred appeared now. "If they're looking for WR 7684, they'll looking a bloody long time," he announced. "Now what's on? Is t where 'e gets off or does 'e work 'is passage a bit further?" And glanced from Nobby to Mr. Oakroyd.

The latter regarded him without enthusiasm. "T'other's bigger rog be bound," he told himself, "but he is a bit friendly wi' it. This chap l knock you on t'head wi' a big spanner as soon as look at you." He ught it wiser to let Nobby answer for him.

'He's all right," said Nobby. "We can take him a bit further. He's sportsman, he is. Best thing we can do is to lay up a bit. Can't through to London now," he added, lowering his voice and addressg himself to Fred; "that's finished. We'll have to wire him tomorrow d make the other way."

'All right, mate," said Fred. "I could do with a bit of shut-eye and drink and a bite of something."

'So could I," said Nobby, who seemed to be thinking deeply.

And Mr. Oakroyd realised that he could, too. He felt cold and ngry, heavy for lack of sleep.

'Not a bleedin' chance round 'ere," said Fred disgustedly. "We're ht off the rotten map."

'Half a minute, half a minute," cried Nobby. "Where are we?"

'Somewhere between Rotherham and Nottingham. There's a signst there. See wot it says. But 'urry up, for God's sake. Let's get ving."

'Good enough!" cried Nobby, after he had inspected the signpost. ve been round here before all right. You can't lose me, chum."

'Wot's the idea?"

'I'll show you," said Nobby, with enthusiasm. "You shut your eyes d open your mouth and see what God sends you. We can lay her a bit and have our drink and shut-eye all right. Drive on, Fred. show you. Get up at the back, Mister, if you're coming with us."

'I'm coming all right," said Mr. Oakroyd, who had been shivering for last ten minutes. He moved off, to climb up again.

Big Annie. Keeps the Kirkworth Inn," he heard Nobby say, in reply some further question from Fred. "You must have been there, or ard of her. She's all right, Annie is."

For the next hour and a half they threaded their way slowly and arily through narrow by-roads, sometimes having to go back for a ssed turning. Mr. Oakroyd was very sleepy now, but he felt chilled ough and as empty as a drum, and so could do nothing but fall into uneasy doze for a minute or two. All the earlier excitement of the night had left him, and more than once he could not help wishing, spite of himself, that he was back in his own bed. As the lorry we rattling and jolting into the most cheerless hours of the night, he beg to regret, in a numbed fashion, that he had ever set eyes on it.

When they pulled up at last outside the Kirkworth Inn, a lonely lit house at a crossroads, with a wide entrance to a yard at one side, t situation did not seem to be much better. The Inn stared at the through the gloom with blind eyes. Mr. Oakroyd could not see the ever finding their way into it. But he climbed down with the oth and stood looking up at its shuttered windows.

“Sure it’ll be all right?” asked Fred uneasily. “We’ve made a ’ell a bad break if we tell ’er oo we are and then there’s nothing doin’. G us taped then.”

But Nobby was still confident. “Leave it to me. She knows me a I know her. It’ll be all right.” And he walked boldly up to the do and rapped upon it. Nothing happened, so after waiting a minute or t he rapped again. They heard a window being pushed up, and then very angry female voice cried: “Wot is it? Wot yer making that no for? Wot d’yer want?”

Nobby called up: “Is that you, Annie? It’s me, Nobby Clarke. Y remember me?”

“Who is it?” she screeched.

“Nobby Clarke. You remember me. Been here before. Pal Chuffy and Steve and that lot. Remember the Yarmouth do, Annie

“Oh, it’s you, is it? Well, wot yer want coming at this time f knocking me up?”

“You slip down and I’ll tell you all about it, Annie. Me teeth’s ch tering here so much I can’t talk.”

The head withdrew, grumbling, and after a minute or two the d was opened and Nobby went in.

“Nobby’s pullin’ it off,” the relieved Fred confided to Mr. Oakro “Soon as I see ’er come down, I knew it was all right. They’ve only to listen an’ Nobby’ll talk ’em into anything. Gor, ’e can talk.” A Fred spat out very noisily to show his appreciation, then lit about h an inch of cigarette.

Nobby came bustling out in triumph. “All right, chums,” he cri t's a go. We can camp here a bit. Shove the old bus round at the ck, Fred, up in the yard. You go round with him, Mister. We'll you both in there."

Mr. Oakroyd followed the lorry round to the yard, took out his little sket trunk and bag of tools, and was then admitted with Fred into a tchen at the back of the inn. A lamp had already been lit there, and obby, now revealed as a tall fattish fellow, with close-cropped hair, purple expanse of cheek, and a huge loose mouth, was blowing at the t ashes, now heaped up with fresh wood, with a gigantic pair of llows. The kitchen was untidy and dirty, and its owner was untidier d dirtier still, an enormous figure of a middle-aged woman mysterisly wrapped about in yards and yards of filthy flannel.

"This is Annie, Mrs. Croucher," said Nobby, putting down the belvs to wave a hand. "And this is Fred—Fred ——"

'Smith," put in that gentleman, whose appearance was even less reuring than his talk. His face was long and thin and was all twisted one side, and he might have been any age between twenty-five and ty-five.

'Fred Smith," continued Nobby blandly. "And he's on the job with , he is. And this other's a chap who's been travelling with us owing a bit of a mistake." And he looked questioningly at Mr. Oakroyd.

'Oakroyd's my name."

'Oakroyd's his name, and he's a sportsman else he wouldn't be with " And Nobby fell to blowing the fire again and soon had it blazing.

'Well, lads, wot's it yer want?" demanded their hostess. " 'Cos if it's aks and chips and feather beds, you've got a bloody hope."

'Anything, Annie, anything," replied Nobby. "A bit of bread and at, if you've got it. And a drink. What's it to be, chum? Beer's cold. I'll tell you what. I'd like a drop o' tea with some rum in it, od old sergeant-major's."

'That's the stuff, mate," said Fred.

It'll do me a treat," said Mr. Oakroyd, who was just beginning to l warm again but still suffered from a gnawing hollow inside him. looked hopefully at the formidable Annie.

Anything to oblige," said Annie, "and I'll take a drop wi' yer. 'Ere, bby, put this kettle on." She produced the remains of a cold joint of beef, a loaf of bread and some butter, four half-pint mugs and a bott of rum. She and Nobby made the tea, Fred hacked away at the join and Mr. Oakroyd, not to be left out, cut half-a-dozen thick slices bread. He was beginning to enjoy himself again. This was a que lot, to be sure, but it would all make a grand tale to tell. He rubb his hands as Nobby brought the steaming teapot on to the table, a the landlady, who was not disposed to be incautious even at this ho of the night, measured out a noggin of rum.

All three of them fell with fury upon their sandwiches and wash them down noisily and happily with the tea, which was very stron very sweet, and well laced with rum. After the landlady had gulp down a hot mixture that was as much liquor as tea, she set her massi flannelled bulk, arms akimbo, before the crackling fire, and watch them with an indulgent, almost maternal eye. "That's putting so 'eart into yer, I can see," she observed complacently. "And wot's t next move, lads?"

"Shut-eye," announced Fred, from the depths of his enormous san wich.

"That's right," said Nobby. "Just pass the little old brown jug, w you, Mister? This'll stand a bit more rum. Yes, we'll have to k down for an hour or two, Annie."

"It'll 'ave to be down 'ere," said Annie. "But put a bit o' wood the fire an' you'll be all right."

"Leave it to us, Annie. And here's the best." Nobby raised his m and emptied it in her honour. "You've done us proud, you ha We're all right. Leave it to us."

"Going to," said Annie. "Gettin' back to bed now. I'll 'ear 'ow t game's goin' and all the news in the morning. And for God's s don't show a light in front. And 'ere, I'll take the damages now. I be six shillings the lot, which is cheap enough, seein' yer've 'ad a nog o' rum between yer."

"Good enough," said Nobby, fumbling in his pockets.

Then Mr. Oakroyd, full of tea and rum and beef and bread, feeli cosy, companionable and sleepy, did a foolish thing. "Here," he cri "I'm a chap as likes to stand me corner. I'll pay for this. Six shill is it?" He searched his pockets but could only discover a solitary s nce. He must have put all the loose money he had with his week's ages on the table at home. But he had four five-pound notes enclosed an old envelope and tucked away in his breast pocket. "Half a inute," he said, and in his anxiety to foot the bill promptly, he was umsy and brought out all four banknotes.

"Gor!" cried Fred, bending forward. "Oo's this we 'ave with us?— r. bloody Rockiefeller. Been touchin' up a bank, mate?"

Mr. Oakroyd looked to see three pairs of eyes fixed on his banknotes d, feeling uncomfortable, he hastily put three of them back in the velope and held out the fourth. "Can you change this, Missis?"

"No, I can't," she replied very emphatically. "An' if I could, I ouldn't. Yer don't land me with one of 'em, oh no! Yer've been in' well, 'aven't yer?" she added significantly.

"All right, Mister. All right, Annie," Nobby put in smoothly. "I'll tle this. Six shillings."

"Be good then, an' turn that light out as soon as you get down to it." d Big Annie removed the bottle of rum, locked the door of the bar, d retired. The three men yawned and, on the advice of Nobby, who sisted upon repeating, "Boots off's half a bed," they took off their ots. In the survey of the room and discussion that immediately folved, Mr. Oakroyd, to his gratified surprise, was awarded the old sofa the corner.

'You're best off there, Mister," said Nobby earnestly, "and you're titled to it, as a sportsman. Isn't he, Fred?"

'E can 'ave it for me," muttered Fred, spreading himself across two irs.

Mr. Oakroyd would have liked to have smoked a last and even more venturous pipe of *Old Salt,* to have heard tales of Big Annie and uffy and the "Yarmouth do," to have talked about the Great North ad, but he was tired out and now that he was warm and comfortably tched out on the sofa, with a little glow of rum inside him, he could dly keep his eyes open. He was aware vaguely that Nobby was ding over the lamp, blowing it out, that now there was only a flicker firelight; dreamily he felt the lorry jolting him again, caught a stly glimpse of the Great North Road; and then fell fast asleep.

II

A strident voice filled the kitchen. Mr. Oakroyd grunted, half opene
his eyes and then closed them again. For a few blessed moments ther
was a silence. Then the voice came again, screeching and cutting lik
a bad circular saw. This time Mr. Oakroyd stirred, shook himself, an
opened his eyes as widely as he could. What he saw astonished hi
For years he had opened his eyes in the morning to see the front be
room of 51, Ogden Street, Bruddersford, and now, for a minute or tw
he could not make out where he was. It took him some time to recolle
in order the events of the previous night, to realise that this was t
first morning of his travels and, incidentally, the last Tuesday in Se
tember. The soul of him still slumbered and what was awake was y
only the mere creature of habit, so that the feeling of being uproot
and suddenly dropped in some strange place brought him no pleasu
And he was still heavy and bemused from lack of sleep; his head ach
a little; his body was stiff and sore. It was not a pleasant waking. L
night he seemed to have fallen asleep in an atmosphere of friendline
but now everything seemed to be different. He raised himself so th
he could look over the neighbouring table, and caught sight of t
enormous back of the landlady, who was padding out of the kitch
into the passage, and a dirty-looking girl in her teens was just coming
from the yard.

"Hello!" he said to the girl. He was standing up now, stretchi
himself.

She stared at him dully. "'Ello!" she said. "Time you woke to

"What time is it?" he asked. He did not possess a watch. Brudde
ford has an elaborate system of factory buzzers—usually known
"whews"—that keeps its humbler citizens informed of the time.

"'Alf-pass-teight. Missis told me to wake yer."

Mr. Oakroyd looked about him. "'Ere," he cried, "where's t'ot
two?"

"Gone."

"Gone?" He looked at her, bewildered.

"Missis said so. I never seed 'em. They must ha' gone before
come in."

He looked out into the yard. No lorry was there. He turned round find Big Annie herself regarding him with marked disfavour. Grimy, ollen, purple-faced, with little greedy bloodshot eyes, she seemed even re unpleasant and formidable now in daylight than she had done last ht.

That's right," she cried shrilly, "they've gone an' long since. Time went too. I can't do with yer 'ere."

All right, all right, Missis," he replied, trying to smile at her and not ceeding. "I don't want to be in t'way. But I've no but just now kened up. Give us a chance. I suppose I can have a bit of a wash an' summat to eat, a bit o' breakfast?"

No, that yer can't." She was quite passionate in her refusal.

Why, what's up, Missis? I can pay for owt I have."

No, yer can't pay for it, not 'ere. I don't want your sort 'ere."

Ar d'you mean 'my sort'?" he demanded, his pugnacity aroused. hat's wrong wi' my sort? If you said them sort as brought me here night, yer friend Nobby an' t'other chap, I'd know what you was ing about. I know that sort, let me tell you——"

'Ere," she cried in a fury, "I don't want any bloody argy-bargying. y've gone, and that's all about it. You go now, sharp as yer can. told yer I don't want yer 'ere." She turned and went padding away. the door, however, she wheeled round. "An' don't try comin' 'ere n, either, 'cos yer won't get in, let me tell yer. Huh! My sort!" gave him another elephantine snort and then turned her back on again.

r. Oakroyd pulled his little brown cap firmly over his head, fastened mackintosh to the basket trunk again, and took up his bag of tools. off then," he said to the girl. "I suppose there's other places where n get a wash and a bite. I don't seem to be what you might call in ur here. What's matter with her?"

dunno. Old bitch!" the girl said vindictively.

Vell, you know her better ner I do," observed Mr. Oakroyd. "And ust say this going out mucky an' empty's nowt i' my line. Nar re do I get to from here? Where's t'nearest place where I can get t of a wash and suchlike, summat to eat?"

he girl came out into the yard with him. "Yer best way's to yer right, straight on then," she said. "Capbridge is first, but that's no goo only a little place. Yer want to foller the road on to Everwell. Yer' be all right there. There's tea-rooms and all sorts in Everwell."

"I should think so with a name like that," said Mr. Oakroyd. "A how far's this Everwell then?"

"Five or six miles. Turn to yer right and straight on then, throug Capbridge, and straight on again. Yer can't miss it."

"Any trams or buses or owt?"

"There's a bus comes past 'ere at two," she replied.

"Two! I'll 'a' pined to death afore two," he cried. "I mun wal that's all. And tell your missis from me not to kill hersen wi' doi ower many good works an' kind actions, tell her she owt to look aft hersen a bit more, she's wearing hersen away to t'bone." And st chuckling over these ironical thrusts, he turned away and made for t road on the right, a bag in each hand.

There were signs that the day would be warm later on. Already t heavy autumn sunlight was dispersing the light mists, and though the was still a faint chill in the air and a glitter of dew on branch and ste Mr. Oakroyd stopped shivering after he had gone a dozen yards a very soon found himself quite warm. Not that he felt much better th he had done. His eyes were still weighted with sleeplessness; his u washed face felt unpleasantly stiff; and he was so empty inside that discovered that his first pipe of *Old Salt* would have to be postpon until after breakfast, whenever that would be. He walked for a m down the narrow twisting road without meeting anybody, then, hearing a light cart come rattling up behind him, he set down his t bags, which were beginning to make his arms ache, and waited at t side of the road.

"Hey!" he cried, when the cart was almost upon him. "You going Everwell, mate?"

"No, I'm not," said the driver, and passed him without another wo or glance.

"That's another o' Big Annie's tribe, I'm thinking, lad," muttered Oakroyd as he watched the cart disappear round the next corner. picked up his bags and set off again, not quite so briskly this time.

Another twenty minutes brought him to Capbridge, which consis seven ruinous brick cottages, a few hens, two dirty children, a brown ngrel limping about uneasily, and an actual bridge not quite three ds long. It was at this bridge that Mr. Oakroyd halted again, to rest arms and to look about him in disgust. Somehow the sight of the ce annoyed him. "Daft little hole," he told himself. "I wouldn't a bite o' food given here, I wouldn't." There was an ancient sign-t near the bridge that said: "Everwell 4 mls," and after casting a ewhat melancholy glance at this, he moved on again. "They don't w a mile when they see one round here," he concluded angrily. e come three now if I've come a yard, and I'll bet this next fower e's more like ten."

Ie had not covered the first of those miles, however, when the luck oured him at last. He met a cart turning in his direction out of a l and this time he was able to beg a lift, though it took several minutes xplain to the driver, a little old whiskered fellow nearly as deaf as of his own sacks, exactly what he wanted. And by the time he had le it plain to his companion that he was travelling about, that he ted a wash and brush-up and some breakfast, Everwell itself was in t. It was a straggling dingy little place that looked somehow as if ad been dropped there, as if a dozen streets or so from some dreary ict in a city had been plucked out and suddenly planted there, and at all as if it had ever grown.

'oughter go to Poppleby's," quavered the ancient driver. "Popple-eatin' place. It's rare and good there, it is."

ight you are," roared Mr. Oakroyd. "I'll go there. Where is it?"

es, it's the best there is. I goes every Saturday night and has meat-'tater pie, every Saturday. I 'as a pint over at Old Crown, then goes ne meat-and-'tater pie."

said 'Where is it?'"

y, cheap enough for them as can afford it," said the old man. Then, they turned the next corner, he pointed with his whip. "Yon's leby's. Yer can get down 'ere." He pulled up.

. Oakroyd descended and collected his luggage. "That'll do me y," he cried loudly. "And thanks for the lift."

h?" The old man leaned forward,

“Thanks for the lift.” By this time Mr. Oakroyd was hoarse. say, thanks for the lift.”

“O’ course you can, any time,” replied the old man mysteriously. H looked at Mr. Oakroyd reproachfully. “I call that a silly questio he said at length, and he drove away, grumbling.

The notice, in large if faded letters, ran: *Good Pull Up. Poppleb Dining Rooms. Cyclists Catered For.* Mr. Oakroyd regarded it wi satisfaction. In the window were some yellow lace curtains, two bott of lime juice and soda, four withered oranges on a plate, a slab of bol checkered brawn, labelled *Poppleby's Best,* some little cakes cover with what had once been bright pink icing, and innumerable gene tions of flies. Mr. Oakroyd did not stop long examining the windo but the sight of it did not lessen his satisfaction. He opened the d and was immediately assailed by the smell of food, which was stro enough to suggest that people had been eating day and night with cessation in that room for the last thirty years. It made Mr. Oakroy mouth water. For the last hour and a half he had wanted food, a here, it was plainly evident, was food in plenty. So richly steeped this dining-room of Poppleby's in the atmosphere of cooking and eati —the oilcloth on the tables was covered with crumbs and the stains recent meals, the very walls and furnishings were greasy with fat, a the air itself was boiled and toasted and fried—that only to walk int was to be nourished at once. A person who was not very hungry not very robust might find a mere entrance sufficient to satisfy or bl the appetite, but such a hungry and robust person as Mr. Oakroyd co only walk in to discover that he was even hungrier than he imagin to wait for Mr. Poppleby with a watering mouth.

This is exactly what Mr. Oakroyd did. The room was empty and o the flies were stirring. He sat himself down on one of the benc coughed and tapped his feet, then finally rapped on his table wit pepper-pot.

“Morning.” The man shot up from behind the counter as if he w part of a conjuring trick. It could only be Mr. Poppleby himself. of him that was visible, his large round face, the top of his long ap his shirt sleeves and the arms that came out of them, was the same sh whitish and faintly greasy. Even his eyes were a pale grey, had a lied look.

'Morning," said Mr. Oakroyd, still staring. "Er—lemme see—er ——"

"Tea-coffee-cocoa-bacon-and-egg-bacon-and-sausage-kipper-boiled-egg-ıte-of-cold-meat-bread-and-butter," said Mr. Poppleby, keeping his ɔminent eyes fixed on Mr. Oakroyd's with never a blink.

Mr. Oakroyd gazed at him with admiration, then removed his little ɔwn cap, possibly as a tribute. "That sounds a bit of all right. I'll a pot o' tea and you can do me two rashers and two eggs. And nty o' bread, Mister," he added.

Pot-of-tea-two-rashers-two-eggs-four-slices-bread." Mr. Poppleby turned ay.

'Ere, I say," cried Mr. Oakroyd. "Can I have a bit of a wash afore art? Been on t'road most o' t'night—wi' a lorry," and he added this without a certain touch of pride.

Certainly you can 'ave a wash, my friend, certainly," replied Mr. ɔpleby with impressive gravity. "You just come this way and I'll l you a wash. I'm not saying it's usual—it isn't usual—but it's no rse for that, is it? You don't want to sit down to your food all dirty, I don't want to see you sitting down to it all dirty, and we're two er men, aren't we? That's right, isn't it? Well, you come this way ı." And off he went, with Mr. Oakroyd in attendance. They ved at a tiny scullery, and Mr. Poppleby waved a hand to indicate presence of a little enamel bowl, a large bar of yellow soap, and a el that had seen long and desperate service. " 'Ere you are, my ıd," he continued. "You can wash 'ere to your 'eart's content. And le you're 'aving your wash, we'll be dishing up your bacon and eggs. That's fair dealing between man and man, isn't it? Give a ı what he asks for—in reason, y'know, for there's reason in every-g—but anyhow, *try* to give a man what 'e asks for—that's my motto." l thus concluding, a trifle unctuously, Mr. Poppleby withdrew.

Vho does he think he is—Lloyd George?" muttered Mr. Oakroyd e took off his coat. He saw that the envelope was still safely stowed y in the breast pocket. "To hear him talk, you'd think he was ing me a steam bath wi' shampoos an' finger-nail cutting to foller." ertheless, when he had spluttered over the enamel bowl and had rubbed himself hard with the only corner of the towel that was n slippery, he felt twice the man he had been, and when he returned the dining-room, passing on his way through a zone newly enriched the smell of frying bacon, he gazed benevolently at the impressive figu of Mr. Poppleby, who was engaged in depositing a pot of tea beside plate of bread, a cup and saucer, a long pointed knife and a two-prong fork.

"Your bacon and your eggs'll be ready in one minute," said M Poppleby, returning to his counter.

"Good enough," cried Mr. Oakroyd, rubbing his hands. "I'm f pining, I can tell you."

"We'll soon put that right." And no consulting surgeon could ha said this more impressively. "So you've been on the road, eh?"

"I have an' all," said Mr. Oakroyd. "Come down t'Great North Ro last night." But, somewhat to his surprise, this did not appear to impr his host.

"Well, what I say is this," Mr. Poppleby began even more weigh than before. "It's all right if you take it all in the right way. Wha mean is, if it makes you more yuman, it's all right. If it doesn't it's wrong. If I've said it once to customers 'ere, I've said it a thous times, just standing 'ere like I am now, talking to somebody like yo self. 'Does it,' I said, 'make you more yuman? 'Cos if it doesn't, k it.' I take a broad view, and when I say yuman, I mean yuman. believe——" and here he fixed his prominent eyes unwinkingly u Mr. Oakroyd—"in yumanity."

"That's right, mister," replied Mr. Oakroyd heartily but with a cer philosophical sternness. "I see your point and I'm with yer." He wo have been better pleased, however, he admitted to himself, to have s the bacon and eggs. A knocking from some place behind suggested they were now ready.

"What I say is, ask yourself all the time 'Is it yuman?' If it i don't touch it. Let it alone. Pass it by. That's my motto—yuma first—and that's the rule 'ere, as you saw right off when you asked f wash. Take the yuman line, I say, and it'll pay you every time." now condescended to hear the knocking, and brought out the ba and eggs. "There you are, my friend," he said, and he said it in manner that it was impossible to believe that he had merely carried dish a few yards. He seemed not only to have done the cooking but have gathered the eggs from distant roosts, to have cured the bacon nself, to have made the very crockery.

Mr. Oakroyd, after telling himself that he wished the cooking had n done by some one a little less human (for the eggs were fried d), ate away with the utmost heartiness and despatch. Every mouth- seemed to be taken in under the auspices of Mr. Poppleby, who ned over the counter and never took his eyes off his solitary customer. the time he had arrived at his third slice of bread, Mr. Oakroyd was dy to open the conversation again. He felt friendly, expansive.

What allus beats me," he announced, "is this here 'Cyclists Catered .' What's difference between cyclists and t'other folk as comes?"

'Am chiefly," replied Mr. Poppleby thoughtfully. "Cyclists is great 'am. I've seen the day when one of these cycling clubs would run right out of 'am by six o'clock Saturday. Mind you, I'm not talking ut last week, nor the week before, nor last year, nor the year before t, I'm talking about before the War. Properly speaking, there's no lists now, not to call cyclists. You might get one now and again, ing on a byke, but there's no real cycling, couples off together, and s, and suchlike. That's gone, that'll never come back. When I ted 'ere, it was all traps and carts and what not on week day, and cyclists—with a few regular locals coming in, of course—at week- s. Now it's all cars and lorries. And what 'appens? They don't at a place like this but goes on to big towns and stops there. That's t's hit this business so 'ard, my friend. It isn't what it was, I can you."

Nowt's what it wor," said Mr. Oakroyd with a kind of cheerful ancholy. "I've seen some changes i' my time. You take textile trade ——"

ut Mr. Poppleby was not taking it. "That is so. And what's it unt to, what's the real difference between them times and these? t's the question I always ask."

nd you're quite right, mate, to ask it," Mr. Oakroyd put in warmly. nd what's the answer? What's the answer?" And Mr. Poppleby ied on so that he could supply it himself. "It's less yuman, that's the difference." And he paused, triumphantly, gazing at Mr. Oakroyd, wl was busy lighting the pipe for which he had long been waiting. Secu on a foundation of bacon and eggs, *Old Salt* was again delicious. M Oakroyd slowly sent a few of its kindly blue clouds rolling through t air, and waited for Mr. Poppleby to continue.

"I've no need to tell a man like you what I mean by 'yuman,'" M Poppleby went on. "I mean there's less of the good old man-to-m spirit. It's take what you can get and run, nowadays. Money and gr and rush, that's what it is. When you're running a business like th you see life, you know what's 'appening in the world, you talk to sorts. Of course there's some men in the catering that's as ignorant you like—and why?—'cos they don't make use of the hopportunit of the business; they see a customer come in, gets 'is order, serves takes the money, and finish. I like to live and learn. I talk to my c tomers and they talk to me, and that's 'ow I go on. I'm learning fr you."

"Ay," said Mr. Oakroyd, who could not help wondering, howe what it was that the other was learning from him. "He doesn't gi' a chance to tell him owt," he told himself, and, feeling that he had h enough of Mr. Poppleby's conversation, he said, "Well, what's t'd age?"

"Lemme see," replied Mr. Poppleby. "Pot-of-tea-two-rashers-two-e four-slices-bread. That'll be one and eight. *And* a fair price if you me."

"Ay, I dare say," said Mr. Oakroyd, who thought it stiffish. He in his pockets and once again produced the solitary six-pence. "I s ha' to ask you to do a bit o' changing for me," he remarked, produ the envelope from his breast pocket.

"We'll try to manage that." Mr. Poppleby made a noise that fai suggested he was laughing. "You want the change and I want yo 'ave it, and we're both satisfied and nobody's the worse. That's yuman line, isn't it?"

But Mr. Oakroyd was staring in front of him open-mouthed. envelope was not empty, but all that it contained was a dirty half-s of paper on which was scrawled "Wishing you a Merry Xmas Happy New Year. XXX." All four banknotes had disappeared.

ı through all his pockets, hoping against hope that somebody had :rely played a trick upon him. But no, they had gone. He had been »bed. And now he understood why he had been given the sofa to ɜp on last night, why Nobby and Fred had departed so early, why : landlady had hustled him out of the place before he had time to nk.

'Ere," he cried, "I've been robbed. Look at this. I'd twenty pound here last night, fower five-pound notes, and sitha, there's nowt there a bit o' paper. I've been robbed and I know who did it." But en he looked at Mr. Poppleby, he saw that that gentleman was re-ding him coldly, with raised eyebrows.

It'll be one and eight," repeated Mr. Poppleby.

This made Mr. Oakroyd very angry. "I tell you I've been robbed o' :nty pound. I haven't one and eight. I've got sixpence, and there s, and that's all I have got. And I know who did it and where it ›pened, too. It were two fellers wi' a lorry at t'Kirkworth Inn last ht."

Are you trying to tell me you lost twenty pound, four five-pound ɜs, at the Kirkworth Inn last night?" demanded Mr. Poppleby. "Be-se if you are, I'm going to ask you what you was doing with so ıy five-pound notes and at such a place. It sounds fishy to me. But 's no business of mine; you go your way and I'll go mine—though sooner you get back to where you come from, the better, I think, friend; but in the meantime you owe me one shilling and eight-ce, whichever way you look at it. And that's what I want from you ıe and eight."

And that's what you can't get from me, Mister," cried Mr. Oakroyd, perated. "Aren't I telling you that I've nobbut sixpence in t'world? , look 'ere." And, rising to his feet, he turned out his trousers :ets. "Twenty pounds I've lost, all I'd got but this here sixpence. but I was a gert blunder-heead!"

You're not the first that's tried it on," said Mr. Poppleby, steadily. Ar d'you mean?" cried Mr. Oakroyd. "I'm not trying anything on. ɜn I come in here, I thought I'd twenty pound i' my pocket. I didn't w I'd been robbed."

"And I didn't know, neither," observed the other, eyeing him susp ciously. "This has happened before 'ere, I'll tell you. And I go trusting people. You come in 'ere and you 'ave my eggs and my bac and my tea——"

"Ay, and your bread and your lump o' washing soap and your muck towel and your drop o' water," Mr. Oakroyd added with great bitt ness. "Go on, go on. You've lost one and eight and I've lost twen pound, and it's bad luck for both on us, but it's a dam' sight war for m 'Ere, there's sixpence, and that knocks it down to one and two. We I'll settle wi' thee, lad." And Mr. Oakroyd, in a frenzy of irritati rushed to his bag of tools and took out a chisel. "You see that chis It's worth more ner any one and two, is that, and you can ha' that your one and two. And when I can pay your fowerteen pence, I w for I'd rather ha' that chisel than all t'shop you've got. Ay, even if y cleaned it up," he added vindictively.

Mr. Poppleby came forward, picked up the sixpence and examined t chisel. "A chisel's no good to me," he said slowly, "but I suppose better let you go. I like to take a yuman line——"

"Yuman line! T-t-t-t. Yuman nothing!" Mr. Oakroyd was v scornful as he gathered his things together.

"That'll do, that'll do." Mr. Poppleby's philosophical vanity was h now. "But let me tell you, my friend, you can't do these sort o' thi 'ere. Don't try it again. I tell you, you can't do it."

"And let me tell you summat, Mister," said Mr. Oakroyd, moving the door. "There's summat you can't do, neither."

"Ho, indeed! And what's that?"

"You can't fry eggs." And Mr. Oakroyd, chuckling, closed the behind him.

Down the sunny length of Everwell he wandered, a man despera situated. He had not a penny, was far from home and, indeed, certain where he was, had no work at a time when work was sc and had not even an insurance card. Yet before he reached the sout end of the town he was chuckling again.

"I had him nicely about them eggs." And he lifted to the sun a still wrinkled and brightened by the pleasures of repartee.

III

was late in the afternoon when Mr. Oakroyd saw the curious motor n. Since leaving Poppleby's Dining Rooms, he had struggled down ne eight or nine miles of dusty road, forever changing his basket trunk m the right hand to the left and his bag of tools from the left hand the right, he had had a bite of bread and cheese and a mouthful of r from a friendly lorry driver, who had not, however, believed a rd that Mr. Oakroyd had told him, and he had slept for two hours der a hedge. Now he was moving on again, very slowly because, one thing, he was tired and rather dazed after his nap, and, for ther thing, he did not know where he was going and was wonder- what to do. The motor van caught his eye at once. It was drawn under some trees just off the road, and was a most unusual vehicle, nething between a rather long delivery van and a caravan proper. A le window had been let into the side, but it had no chimney nor any he shining contrivances of the real caravan. Paint and polish it had ne; the car itself seemed old and rusty; and the wagon or caravan t of it had a woefully weatherbeaten look. After noticing all these ails with a craftsman's eye, Mr. Oakroyd might have passed on had not heard, from the back of the van, the sound of sawing, a sound t made him prick up his ears at once. And it took him not more n a minute to arrive at a certain conclusion.

Yond chap can't handle a saw," he announced to himself, and walked oss to investigate, emboldened by his plight and the knowledge that Jess Oakroyd, could handle a saw. Once at the back of the van, he pped his bags, lit his pipe, stuck his hands in his pockets, and thus easily into his rôle of spectator.

he man with the saw looked up as Mr. Oakroyd approached and n dubiously set to work again. He was a thick-set fellow in his early ies, with black hair cropped close, eyes almost as black as his hair, a broad clean-shaven face almost as red as the scarf he wore in place collar and tie. Though he was in his shirt sleeves and his brown k suit was shabby, he looked far more dashing and dressy than Mr. kroyd or any of Mr. Oakroyd's friends. Nevertheless, his appearance not clash at all with that of the van. There was about him an air of vagabondage that Mr. Oakroyd recognised at once, though he cou not have put a name to it. Without obviously being anything defin himself, the man yet called to mind strolling actors and soldiers a sparring partners and racing touts and cheap auctioneers.

He looked up again after Mr. Oakroyd had been standing there minute or two. “Nice day, George,” he remarked with a wink.

“Ay,” said Mr. Oakroyd; and then, not to be outdone in this mat of handing out names, he added, drily: “Nice enough, Herbert.”

“ ’Ere,” said the man, straightening himself, “now I ask you. D look like Herbert?”

“Nay, I don’t know.” Mr. Oakroyd paused a moment. “But I’ll you what you *don’t* look like, if you ask me.”

“Go on, George. I’ll buy it.”

“You don’t look like a chap as knows how to use a saw,” replied Oakroyd, softening the severity of this criticism with a companiona grin.

“Oh? Now we’re ’earing something, aren’t we?” He dove into waistcoat pocket, fished out a packet of Woodbines and a box of matc and lit up. “Do you know all about saws, George?” he enqui amiably.

Mr. Oakroyd’s reply to this was to fetch his bag of tools and dum down at the other’s feet. “You tell me what you’re trying to do, ma he said earnestly, “and I’ll soon show you what I know about saws.”

“ ’Ello, ’ello!” the man cried in mock astonishment. “What’s ruddy idear? You a tradesman, George?”

“I am an’ all,” replied Mr. Oakroyd, not without pride. “I’m a joi and carpenter by trade.”

“Well, I’ll tell you something now. My turn, see. You don’t c from round ’ere. You come from Leeds.”

“Nay, I don’t. I come from Bruddersford.” And this seemed to Oakroyd a different thing altogether from coming from Leeds, an he was triumphant.

“Near enough,” said the other complacently. “Knew you came f that way. Tell it in a minute. Bruddersford, eh? Know Lane Fair?”

“Tide, you mean.”

"That's right. Lane End Tide. All 'tides' round there, aren't they? on't call 'em fairs."

"Course I know it," said Mr. Oakroyd.

"So do I," exclaimed the man in triumph. "Been there many a time. gave it a miss this year but was there last year. What are you doing und 'ere? Looking for a job?"

"Ay, I'm looking for a job nar," said Mr. Oakroyd bitterly. "I'll ha' get one right sharp, too. I've been landed properly, I have." And e next minute he was telling the story of his lost twenty pounds. It as the third time he had told it that day, but it was the first time he had und a listener who believed him.

"Where did you get the fivers from?" asked the other, at the end of e story. "Back a winner?"

"Nay, I never put owt on horses. But another chap had backed a lot winners seemingly." And, encouraged by the reception of his previous cital, he now told the story of the drunken sportsman and his bulging ocket-book, to all of which his companion, now sitting on the steps of s van, listened with a quick and humourous sympathy.

"Easy come, easy go, that," he observed. Then he reflected. "What d you say the name of that feller was, the one with the lorry? Nobby larke? I've known a few Nobby Clarkes in my time. One or two'ud ave taken the milk out of your tea. Was he a little feller with a turned-p nose, Cockney twang, bit of a boxing man, lightweight?"

"Nay, this chap was a big fat feller wi' a big round bilberry face on im the size o' two," said Mr. Oakroyd. "A smooth-talking chap, he ore, though I thought he were a bit of a rogue as soon as I clapped es on him."

"I believe I know that feller. Nobby Clarke. Nobby Clarke? A ller like that used to go round with Mason's *Magic and Mysteries,* and might have called 'imself Nobby Clarke. I shall remember 'im. If saw 'im myself I should know in a minute. Never forget a dial. I eet a feller and say ' 'Ello, saw you at so-and-so five years ago, six ars, seven years, ten years ago,' whatever it is; and 'e says 'That's right. was there. Don't remember you'; and I says 'No, but I remember you.' m right every time. Marvellous, isn't it?"

"And so you're one o' these as goes wi' t'tides—fairs—like?"

"That's me! My name's Jackson. What's yours?"

"Oakroyd. Jess Oakroyd."

"Oakroyd. Good enough! Well, mine's Jackson—Joby they call m
—Joby Jackson. Everybody in this line o' business knows me. Bee
in it twenty years, and been in it longer only I started in the old milit
and then joined up again in the War. Done everything—you ask an
body—Joby Jackson. Boxing shows, circus, try-your-luck games, ever
thing. I've run shows of me own—Human Spider and Wild Man
the Amazon. You can't name a place where they 'ave a fair or a rac
meeting I 'aven't been to, you can't do it. I know 'em all. Englan
Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Isle o' Man, Isle o' Wight, you can't lose m
Marvellous!" He jerked a thumb over his shoulder at the van. "On
steady line now. I'm selling 'em something. Got ter do it—isn't enou
money about for the old games—you've got to sell 'em something no
Rubber toys is my line, rubber dolls, rubber animals—you blow 'em u
—and here he blew away, for he was a man who illustrated his ta
with innumerable rapid and vivid gestures—"and there y'are. Seen 'em
Good line—plenty o' profit—easy to carry—all flat, you see, light as
feather. Get a good day and they sell like beer in barracks. Some da
you can't sell anything—you wouldn't get buyers if you were offeri
bottles o' Scotch at ninepence a time. But get a good day ——" and aft
a little overture of winking, he unloaded in rapid dumb show a host
invisible rubber dolls and animals upon an invisible multitude—"marv
lous. Only thing is, too much competition! They're all tumbling to
all coming in now. When a few more gets in, I shall get out, see? I
try something else, sell 'em something new. That's the idear, isn't
George?"

"And you go round i' this?" Mr. Oakroyd looked at the van.

"That's it," replied Joby, with enthusiasm. "Take a decco at 'er. N
exactly a ruddy Rolls-Royce, but she moves, George, she moves. Y
can't get more than twenty miles an hour out of 'er, 'cept down ste
'ills, but that's enough, what d'you say? Got 'er for fifteen quid—
gift; then 'ad a winder put in, then a bunk, then a couple o' bun
If I don't want to sleep anywhere else, I sleep in there, see? I'm sleepi
in there tonight. Got a little stove in there, carry all my stock in
stall and all. 'Ere, I was trying to patch up the old stall when you co

e. It got a nasty knock yesterday. Like to see what you could do th it? I'm no good with my 'ands. Funny thing, isn't it? I can sell ything, do the patter, but can't use my 'ands; must 'ave been born a ddy gentleman. Like to 'ave a do at the old stall, George? I'll see u're all right."

"Leave it to me, mate," cried Mr. Oakroyd, delighted. "Let's have a ok at t'rest of it. Got any nuts and bolts and three-inch nails?" To-ther they pulled out from the floor of the van the remaining pieces of oodwork, and Joby discovered that he had some spare nuts and bolts d plenty of long nails. "Nar then," said Mr. Oakroyd, "you tell me at you want and I'll set you up i' no time." And in another minute had his bag of tools open and his coat off and was happily at work.

"'Ow about a drop o' Rosie Lee?" said Mr. Joby Jackson. He was ry fond of this queer rhyming slang, most of which must be omitted om any record of his talk because it is incomprehensible to ordinary ople. Even Mr. Oakroyd, who was acquainted with this kind of ng, though he rarely used it himself and, indeed, associated it with her disreputable characters, was sometimes puzzled. But he was not wildered, of course, by any mention of the famous Rosie, and he was ore than ready for a drink of tea. So Joby strolled away to fill the ttle, returned with it to busy himself in the van, and then came out ain to sit on the steps and watch Mr. Oakroyd at work.

"Fond o' tarts, George?" he enquired.

"Nay, I've had all t'tarts I want," Mr. Oakroyd grunted in reply, still nding over his saw. He quite understood that the question did not fer to things to eat.

"Tarts or booze—or both," said Joby reflectively, "that's where the ther begins. You wouldn't be 'aving to mend that stall now if it dn't been for a tart. I've 'ad a pal with me lately—Tommy Muss they ll 'im. Silly name, isn't it? Clever little feller, though, Tommy. I've own 'im years. 'E used to go round with Oxley's Circus, one time, en 'e ran a little ball-on-a-string game—one o' them where you gets watch, that is if you're lucky and the feller that's running the game on't 'appen to lean on the board when you're 'aving your go, see— t 'e wasn't good at it, wasn't Tommy. So 'e come round with me. ou can manage by yourself at this, but it's better with two. Booze isn't Tommy's trouble, though he can shift it as well as the next. It tarts. Can't keep away from the women, and they can't keep away fro 'im. Good-lookin' little feller, Tommy, an' got a bit o' ruddy swan yer know—and they like it, George, they like it. And 'e's the be mouth-organ player you ever 'eard in all your natural, easy the best- never 'eard anybody to touch Tommy with a mouth-organ—play an thing—marvellous! There was a piece about 'im once in *The World Fair*. 'E oughter 'ave gone on the stage as a mouth-organ turn. I' told 'im so many a time. 'E's a mug. 'E could 'ave been getting twen quid a week. 'E wouldn't bother, though, too busy square-pushin taking the girls out, see. Well, anyhow, there's a tart 'e's 'ad 'is eye o some time—black flashing sort o' bit she is—and 'er and another woma runs one of these palmistry Gipsy Queen stunts, see. We kept comin across 'em—working the same fairs,—and I saw Tommy was workin 'is points. 'Alf a minute, we'll 'ave the Rosie now, George."

Joby mashed the tea in a mess-tin, stirred some sweet condensed mil into it, then poured his companion's share of the rich brew into a lar thick cup, across which was written *Moseley's Coffee Taverns Ltd.,* an retained the mess-tin for his own use. He also brought out of the va a biscuit tin containing two-thirds of a loaf of bread and some butte

" 'Ow's this, George?"

"Grand!" replied Mr. Oakroyd, munching away. He looked abo him and would have sighed with pleasure if he had not been so bu eating. Everything was still and the sky was a fine blaze of gold. Th tea was exactly the strong and sweet mixture he preferred, and not f years had he enjoyed a slice or two of bread and butter as much as h was doing now. "I'll make a right job o' this stall," he told himse turning a grateful glance upon his host. And after a few puffs of *O Salt,* he announced, "I'll get on wi' t'job nar," and returned happily work.

"You were saying summat about yer pal and this here Gipsy Que lass," he said, when Joby had cleared away the things and was sitti down again on the steps.

"Lemme see," reflected Joby. "Oh yes—about that bit o' bother 'ad yesterday. Well, you see, yesterday we're at a little place call Brodley, thirty or forty mile away, where there's a bit of a fair. Th

art’s there and Tommy’s square-pushing ’er as ’ard as ’e can go, see.
E’s the sheek of Araby there all right. But this tart ’ad been going
ound with a feller called Jim Summers. This feller’s tried all sorts
nd just now ’e’s running one o’ these try-your-strength things—yer
now what I mean—down with the ’ammer and up she goes and rings
e bell—no good now, played out. ’E’s a big feller—fourteen stone
sy—and used to be a bit of a fighting-man—a slogger, you know,
ained on booze. Well, this tart ’ad been going round with this feller,
m Summers, and then she’d given ’im the go-by, see. You know what
ey are, and I expect ’e’d taken too many loads on and knocked ’er
out a bit. But if ’e couldn’t ’ave ’er, nobody else would, neither—
at was ’is line, and ’e’s a big feller, gilled arf the time and with a
sty temper. Tommy gets away with it with this tart yesterday
operly, and Jim Summers is on the same ground and ’ears about it,
mes lookin’ for ’em. This tart and the other Gipsy Queen—a fattish
oman, comes from Burnley—’ad packed up ’cos there wasn’t much
in’ anyhow. Tommy comes round the back of the stall. ‘’Ere,’ ’e
ys, ‘I’m off with this tart for a day or two, and I’m off now. I don’t
ant any bother with a mad-drunk ’eavyweight like Summers. Join
r later on, Joby,’ ’e says. ‘Right you are, Tommy,’ I says. I knew ’e
ew what the programme was, see. Nottingham Goose Fair starts a
eek this Thursday. Ever been? Marvellous! It’s one of my best
tches, and I’m getting a fresh lot of stock in for it, pickin’ it up at
ottingham before the fair starts. So I’m just working a lot of little
aces, filling time in, like, not too far away. We ’ad it all worked out
me and Tommy, always do, yer know—so that ’e knew the pro-
amme, and I knew ’e’d join me soon as ’e could, might be tomorrow,
ight be next week. This tart might be working the same places, and
she wasn’t, ’e’d see ’er at the Goose Fair. So off ’e went, and where
ey went to I don’t know, so I can’t tell you. It didn’t bother me. I
dn’t want to foller ’em in their Abode of Love. But I knew what was
ming to me—Jim Summers. Up he comes, just after Tommy’d gone.
’d been in the boozer at dinner-time and ’e was nasty, very nasty.
Ere,’ ’e says, giving the old stall a bang or two, ‘where’s that um-pum-
m-bloody-um-pum-pum little pal o’ yours?’ ’Strewth, you ought to
e ’eard ’im. Top of ’is voice, too. ‘Don’t ask me,’ I says—and I don’t

mind telling you, George, I was wishing I was a long way off, though I can use 'em a bit. 'You know,' 'e says, 'and you're going to bloody well tell me or this something-something stall o' yours goes up in the air.' And 'e begins kicking about a bit, see. ' 'Ere,' I says, 'you leave that alone.' But 'ow's the repairs going, George?" He stood up and began to inspect the other's handiwork.

"You tak' hold o' that end," said Mr. Oakroyd, now in command "We'd better fix her up and see how she stands. Steady, mate, steady Nar then, drop it in."

They spent the next half hour rigging up the stall, Mr. Oakroy making certain improvements at the owner's suggestion. When no mor could be done—Joby declaring that it was now better than ever—the took it down and packed it away in the van, well content.

"I passed a boozer about two miles down this road," said Joby. "Wha about 'aving a can or two?"

This brought Mr. Oakroyd out of his pleasant dream of craftsman ship, and he was troubled. "I could do one," he said dubiously, "but have nowt. I'd better be thinking what to do wi' mysen."

"That's all right, George. You're with me, see. 'Ere, you're not doin anything, are yer? Well, you stay with me till Tommy comes rollin 'ome again—might be a day, might be two days, might be a wee You'll 'ave somewhere to sleep, your grub, and I'll see you've somethin to be going on with when 'e does come back. I'm going to a little pla called Ribsden tomorrer—got a weekly market and there's a bit of fair on—and you can give me a 'and, see? What say?"

"You're not doing this because I have nowt, are yer?" demanded M Oakroyd severely, his independence up in arms. "I don't want—wha it?—charity, you know."

"Charity nothing!" cried Joby. "Oo d'yer think I am? Lord Lor dale? I want yer to give me a 'and, see. Besides, you've done me o good turn already. Can't I do you one?"

"You can an' all," said Mr. Oakroyd. "I'll be right glad to stop your mate comes back."

"Put it there if it weighs a ton," cried Joby. And they shook han "Is everything in? 'Ere, shove your tools in the van. And put that

; well. Is that yer luggage? Looks like four days at Sunny Southport, ıat does. 'Strewth, I 'aven't seen one o' them things for years. Get in. /e'll run 'er down to the boozer—too far to walk. Now then, Liz, t's give a turn to the old 'andle. She's startin', she's startin'. No, she's ɔt. Now then, Liz, what about it? There she goes. J'ever 'ear such ı engine? Sounds like one o' them electric pianners startin'. She sn't 'ad any oil in 'er since I left Doncaster. Now then, 'old tight, eorge, we're off."

"What happened wi' this chap you were talking about, this chap Summers?" shouted Mr. Oakroyd as they went rattling down the road.

"A bobby come round just when the bother began," replied Joby. And Summers slung 'is 'ook. I packed up just after that and come ɔwn 'ere. Where 'e went to I don't know. I'm wondering what 'is ogramme is. Sure to see 'im at Nottingham, but 'e'll 'ave got over it / then."

"Ay, let's hope so," said Mr. Oakroyd, who found that he too kept ondering what the movements of this Summers might be. He could ıly hope that this chap had never heard of the place they were going tomorrow, Ribsden. He had never heard of it himself before. After little while he remarked casually: "I suppose you chaps is allus comg across each other, aren't you?"

"You bet yer life!" replied Joby heartily. "Can't go anywhere withıt seeing some o' the boys. Same old crowd, same old round, year ter year. Marvellous!"

"Ay, I suppose so," said Mr. Oakroyd thoughtfully, and began to think out other things.

They had two pints each at the little public-house, and Joby was the ccess of the evening there. In less than ten minutes the taproom was s kingdom. His talk became more and more staccato and yet more amatic; he showered winks and nudges upon his companions; he owed them how Bermondsey Jack went down to a foul from the gger, how Dixie Jones got in with his left, how his old friend, Joe lapham—"best welterweight we ever 'ad—but a mug, see—fight anyody—do it for nothing"—had two years of glory, laying 'em all out, ing through the lot "like a dose o' salts"; he took them through fairs and boxing booths and race-meetings and pubs from Penzance to Abe deen, and told them about three-card men and quack doctors and booki and 'tecs; and the later it grew the more often his "Marvellous!" ran through the admiring taproom. Even the landlord was impressed an insisted upon standing him a farewell pint. As for Mr. Oakroyd, h wandered through an enchanted country. Being a respectable Bru dersford workingman, he had no desire to be one of these people or pass his life in their world. But to hear about them and it, perhaps meet some of these people, to dive into this fascinating world, this w enchantment. He drank his beer, pulled away at his *Old Salt,* and s there, never missing a word or a gesture, dazed and happy. And wh they drove back to the convenient harbourage at the side of the roa the talk still went on, and by the time they were settling down in t van, taking off their boots and coats and then stretching out on t bunks and rolling in a blanket each, they had arrived at football and common enthusiasm, so that it was very late indeed before Mr. Oakro said "t'United" for the last time and Joby Jackson had no more fu backs and centre forwards to bring out for his inspection. A gra night.

They were silent. The queer little noises of the night crept into t dark van. Mr. Oakroyd listened to the strange rustling and scratchi for several minutes, and was then startled by a sudden melanch screech. "Eh, that's a funny noise, isn't it? It gives you the creep

"Owl," explained Joby. "I don't mind it—used to it. Tell you wh I can't stand. Trams. 'Orrible sound at night, trams. If I'm in a pl where there's trams, I never go to bed till they've stopped. Can't get sleep for 'em—gives me the 'eart-ache or the stomach-ache. Ah, well," added drowsily, "not a bad life this, not while yer can stand up and ch your grub. Keep going and see a bit o' life, I say, we'll all be dead s enough. What say, George?"

"There's summat i' that," replied Mr. Oakroyd, with true Brudd fordian caution. But in truth he was really still a little dazed by wonder of it all. "I maun tell our Lily about this chap," he reflect "She'll be right amused." And there was a moment, in the shadows sleep, when he caught her smiling at him across the wastes.

IV

The next morning they were up and away very early. "Take us an hour o get there," Joby explained. "And I want a good pitch." They made a quick breakfast, tea and bread and boiled ham, and were bumping down the road before the sun had struggled through the clouds.

"Bit colder than it wor," said Mr. Oakroyd.

Joby gave the morning an expert glance. "Weather's breaking. Won't be so warm today, you'll see. Might rain. If it doesn't today, it will omorrer. Rain's no good to us. A couple o' weeks of it and yer see me going to the nearest three brass balls, selling the little 'ome up. Talk bout sailors! We're the blokes that 'ave to watch the weather."

Ribsden, a squat little town not unlike Everwell, but rather larger, was already in a bustle when they arrived. The combined fair and market filled the square and was creeping up several streets leading into t. Joby secured a pitch that pleased him, however, for it was just at he junction of the main street and the square and—as he pointed out t once—"dead opposite a boozer"—*The Helping Hand.* They were not able to keep the van with them, but had to take out everything hey wanted, stall and stock, and then park it up a side-street in a line f other cars and carts and caravans. Together they set up the stall and egan decorating it with rubber dolls and animals, most of which had o be inflated. From time to time, Joby would give a shout, recognizing ome acquaintance, but everybody was too busy to talk, except the nlookers, the local crowd, which was made up of little boys who were o interested that they got in the way and had to be cursed out of it gain, little girls who jumped up and down on the pavement in an cstasy of anticipation, a policeman with a ginger moustache who apparntly did not like markets and fairs, and a policeman without a mousache who apparently did like them. Mr. Oakroyd enjoyed every minute f it. He enjoyed the bustle and hammering and shouting, the setting p and decoration of the stall, upon which he now turned a proud arental eye, the autumn snap in the air and the first gleams of sunght, the now thoroughly adventurous flavour of *Old Salt,* and the ompanionship of the knowing and voluble Joby. He did not see himelf as a salesman of rubber dolls, though he soon became expert in blowing them up and setting them out; but, taking it all in all, it was—as he admitted to himself more than once—"a champion do."

Joby completed his preparations for the day by tacking a number of little placards to the posts of the stall: "Don't forget the Little Ones," they screamed at the passer-by. "Shops Can't Compete"; "We lead. Others follow"; "British Workmanship Can't Be Beat"—which was probably true enough and worth saying, even though all Mr. Jackson's stock seemed to come out of boxes bearing foreign labels. To crown all, in the centre of the cross-bar at the top was a larger placard, glorious in scarlet, announcing that "Joby Jackson is Here Again. The Old Firm." Having done this and surveyed his handiwork with great satisfaction, Joby had leisure to turn his attention to his neighbours.

One of them had just arrived to claim a little space on the left, dumping into it an easel and a box. He was a tall seedy man dressed in a frock coat that shone in the sun and looked greenish in the shade. He wore no hat, and had a grey mop of hair at the back of his head but none at all in front. His eyebrows were so large and so black that they did away with the necessity of closely shaving the face below them, a fact of which their owner had recently taken a generous advantage.

"Morning, Perfesser," said Joby to this personage.

"Good morning," said the Professor, who had a hollow booming voice. "Ah, it's Mr. Jackson. Good morning. Neighbours again eh? I think I saw you at Doncaster."

"You did. Got a good stand 'ere." And Joby jerked a thumb a *The Helping Hand.*

"Ah yes. I'd never noticed that. Well, it might be useful, Mr Jackson. I've known the time when ——" And he completed the sentence by raising a large dirty hand towards his mouth, which brough from its cavernous depths a sound suggesting laughter. Then h looked very grave. "Nothing much for me here today, Mr. Jackson. A mere stop-gap, nothing more."

"Same 'ere," said Joby. "Where you been since Doncaster, Perfesser?

"Places without a name, you might say," the Professor boomed mournfully. "Little markets, miserable affairs, pounds of cheese and yards o muslin and ducks and hens. Rural solitudes, Mr. Jackson. And vas carrying the wrong line too. If I'd been running the rheumatic ure or the digestive tonic, all might have been well, but at the present ime I'm doing the Character and Destiny business and it's a town business, absolutely a town business. I thought of changing over but here wasn't time to get the bottles. And you must have bottles nowadays, must have bottles. They won't swallow the pills, Mr. Jackson. That's not bad, eh? Just keep an eye on that box, will you? I'll be back in about ten minutes." And the Professor strode away.

"Yond chap'ud make a good loud speaker," said Mr. Oakroyd, who had been listening with delight to this dialogue.

"That's what 'e is, if you ask me," replied Joby. "Clever feller, though, he Perfesser. Known 'im off and on years. All patter, y'know. Marvellous! 'E'd sell 'em anything. No expenses, all profit, in 'is line. Clever feller. Edjucated, y'know—that's what does it. They wouldn't believe you and me if we tried it on the same as 'e does. 'E'd make em believe anything, sell 'em the boots off their feet."

"Ay, I dare say," Mr. Oakroyd observed thoughtfully. "But he hasn't got fat on it."

"Too much booze—lives on it—telegraphic address: Blotting Paper. Sides, the game's not what it was, and that's a fact. Too much edjucation about for fellers like 'im. They're beginning to rumble 'im." Then he changed his tone, so suddenly that he startled Mr. Oakroyd. "Nar then, lady, take yer choice. Ninepence, one shilling, one-and-six, wo shillings, all guaranteed not to burst, tear, burn, or drown, the best ubber on the market today. Pick where yer like, they're all the best." It ooked as if their first customer had arrived.

There was now a steady flow of folk round the stalls, from which ssued startling brazen voices. So far the crowd was chiefly composed of women with baskets; the pleasure-seekers would come later; but or those who, like Joby, catered for the family, the day's trade had begun. Mr. Oakroyd, hanging about at the back of the stall, discovered a new interest in life. He had never helped to sell anything before, and now it seemed to him an amusing gamble. Would the little boy with *H.M.S. Lion* on his hat succeed in dragging his mother over to see the ubber animals? Would the woman with the carpet bag, who talked ncessantly to her companion and turned over dolls and animals without ever looking at them, end by buying anything or was she merely there to have her talk out in peace? Joby seemed to know, as a rule, and some people he left entirely alone, some he took gently into his confidence in the matter of rubber toys, and others he bullied outright into buying. Mr. Oakroyd, trying to be helpful but not finding much to do, regarded his new friend with admiration.

"Got the idear, George?" said Joby, looking straight in front of him but twisting his mouth round and winking very rapidly, a method of address that suggested unfathomable confidences. "Take note o' the patter and prices, see. Might want yer to take on a bit soon."

A minute or two later it would have been almost impossible to hear this message because their neighbour on the right suddenly opened the day's campaign. Even when he began, this linoleum merchant, he was coatless, perspiring, in a fury of salesmanship, and every moment he became more tempestuous, banging his rolls of linoleum, his little table, his own hand, anything and everything, and worked himself into such a frenzy that it made you hot to see him, made your throat ache to listen to him, and turned the purchase of a roll of linoleum into an act of common kindness. "Now I'll tell yer whattam going ter do, people," he would yell. "Just to make a start, I'm not going ter sell yer linoleum, I'm going ter give it ter yer. Here y'are." And he would unroll a length and bang away at it in a passion. "Now that's not oilcloth, it's the very best lino-carpet pattern, rubber-backed—and there's four yards if there's an inch and yer couldn't buy it under fifteen shillings in any shop in this town or any other town." Here he would draw a deep agonised breath, then give the roll another bang. "Five shillings. Four and six. Four shillings. Well, I'll tell yer what I'll do Three and six. Three and six, and I'm giving it away. All right then Here! Pass me up that other piece, Charlie. Now then," he would burst out afresh, beating the new piece unmercifully, "there's three yards here—yer could cover a landing with it and it 'ud last yer a lifetime—and I'll put the two together. Six shillings the two." He would glare at the crowd, mop his brow, and run a finger round his sopping rag of a collar. "It's not oilcloth I'm trying to sell yer," he would begin again, and his voice was the last despairing shriek of reasoned conviction in a world hollow with doubt and fear. If any one there said that it *wa* ilcloth it seemed as if the man would have vanished in flame and moke.

On the other side, the Professor, who had returned to set up his easel, vas standing in silence, frowning upon three small boys who were vaiting there to see if he would do anything to entertain them. *Do ou Know Your Fate?* asked the easel, and then went on: *Professor iro Can Tell You. What Is the Message of the Stars? Destiny! Will ower! Personality! The Chance of a Lifetime!! Don't Miss t!!!* But so far the good people of Ribsden, bargaining and chattering n the light of the sun, seemed to care nothing for the dark secrets of this fe. Perhaps the Professor's hour would strike when the night stole own upon them, beckoning its old troupe of ghosts. Meanwhile, he ried, quite vainly, to intimidate the three small boys with his immense yebrows, and stood there, in a dignified silence, nursing a packet of oloured papers.

The Professor's other neighbour, a broad-faced, spectacled young man, ery carefully dressed, was as noisy as the linoleum merchant, and oked like a bank clerk in a frenzy. Nobody seemed to know what e was selling or even if he was selling anything at all. He held up number of plain envelopes, shook them in the faces of his audience, nd talked continually of one Walters of Bristol. "When Mis-ter Walrs of Bris-tol," he roared in the manner of one discussing his friend e Prime Minister, "gave me these envelopes, he assured me that in very one of them there was a banknote, and he sent me down here to ll them to you purely and simply as an advertisement. Mr. Walters new and I knew that there was no money to be made out of this. 's a good advertisement. And when Mis-ter Wal-ters guaranteed that ere was a banknote in every one of these envelopes, that was good ough for me. I knew that Mis-ter Wal-ters of Bris-tol would not nd me on a fool's errand, I can assure you, people." And he went n assuring them and shaking his mysterious envelopes in their faces.

A little after noon, the Professor left his stand and approached Joby. I was wondering, Mr. Jackson," he began, in a confidential whisper, f you had a spare shilling about you. Just until tonight, you know."

Joby nodded towards *The Helping Hand*. "Going in?"

"Yes, I thought that perhaps a little—er——"

Joby cut him short. "You come with me, Perfesser. 'Ere, George you can take over a bit, eh? Shan't be long."

So Mr. Oakroyd was left in charge, and before Joby had returned he had sold a vermilion stork with wooden feet, a policeman on traffi duty, and a shrimp-coloured and dropsical rubber infant, taking fou shillings in all, of which, he knew, at least half-a-crown was sheer profit This was good business.

When Joby came back, an hour later, he brought with him a bottl of beer and two meat pies. "Yer can't stir in there now," he explained "so I got yer these, see. Knock off and get outside these, then 'av a walk round. Wotcher done?"

Mr. Oakroyd, attacking the first of the meat pies, reported his sale "A bird, a bobby, an' a bairn, for fower bob."

"Yer a ruddy poet, George, if yer ask me," said Joby in great goo humour. "The Perfesser's still in there. We shan't see 'im now til closing time. 'E's found the 'elping 'and all right. 'E'd lowered abou five when I left, and all buckshee. 'E could talk a feller into givin' 'im bucketful. Clever feller, the Perfesser, but I wouldn't like to see th coloured menagerie 'e sees some o' these nights."

By the time Mr. Oakroyd had finished his two pies and the bottl of beer, had walked round the fair and market and explored the tow and had returned to have a smoke with Joby, it was nearly tea-tim "Not much doing now till about six," Joby told him. "Yer can ta on a bit, see. I'll 'ave a decco at the old van, a drop o' Rosie, and word wi' some o' the boys. Don't forget them monkeys is two b apiece—they're extra special, they are—they cost *me* ninepence."

The linoleum merchant and the friend of Mr. Walters of Bristol h each large audiences, but there appeared to be a temporary slump rubber toys. Very few people even looked at the stall, partly, no dou because its two neighbours were so much more exciting and noisy. T only questions Mr. Oakroyd found himself answering referred to Jo himself and not to his stock-in-trade.

" 'Ello! This is Joby Jackson's, isn't it? Where's old Joby today?"

"Knocking about," Mr. Oakroyd would reply, and the enquirer wou saunter off again.

This happened several times, and Mr. Oakroyd began to assume nowing air with these fellow professionalists of the road. But he was ot able to do more than make a beginning. The tide that had carried im along so smoothly these past twenty-four hours suddenly turned gainst him. One of these fellow professionalists who had been moving imlessly through the crowd caught sight of the stall, stopped, and stared. Ir. Oakroyd, staring back at him, came to the conclusion that he was ot a pleasant-looking chap. After standing there a minute or two, ie man came closer and examined the stall, its placards, its rubber olls, its uneasy salesman, with little bloodshot eyes. He was a big ian, whose huge shoulders were encased in a dirty football jersey; iere was three or four days' stubble on his great prow of a jaw; and e looked as if he had recently wakened from a drunken sleep to find imself in a very bad temper. As he stood there, signs of intelligence egan to dawn in his face, but the sight was not a pleasing one.

It was Mr. Oakroyd, however, who broke the silence at last. He ould not stand this scrutiny any longer. "Like a doll, mate?" he sked, with dubious good-fellowship in his tone and glance.

"Like a doll!" the large man spat out in contempt. "Do I look as I wanted a bloody doll, do I now, do I?" Then, suddenly, appallingly, e became as angry as a goaded bull. "Where's that——" and he proceeded to apply a number of words to the absent Joby that shocked Ir. Oakroyd, accustomed as he was to most of them. "Where is 'e? 'y'ear?" And he brought his huge fist down on the stall so that very stork and monkey and policeman hanging there started dancing, nd then he leaned forward and pushed his face nearer to Mr. Oakroyd's.

"Well," he roared, "wot d'yer say, yer silly-looking——?"

Mr. Oakroyd kept perfectly still and quiet. This, he knew, was Jim ummers. It couldn't be any one else but Jim Summers. He remembered everything he had heard about Jim Summers. And he tried to ink, and it was difficult. "Now I'll tell yer whattam going ter do, eople," came the voice on the right. "And it isn't oilcloth I'm selling er." Joby might be back any minute. Meanwhile, he wasn't here, nd Jim Summers undoubtedly was. "When Mis-ter Wal-ters of Bris-ol," the left boomed steadily, "came to me and gave me these envelopes——" Mr. Oakroyd looked Jim Summers in the eye.

"He's not here," he muttered.

"Can't I see 'e's not 'ere! I'm asking where 'e is. Yer not a bloody stuck pig, are yer? Yer can talk, can't yer? This is 'is stall, isn't it?"

Still Mr. Oakroyd made no reply.

"I'd like ter give yer something uttud make yer open yer mouth," said the angry Summers, looking very ugly. "Well, I can wait 'er a bit."

Mr. Oakroyd found his voice now. "It's not a bit o' good your doin that, mate. Joby Jackson's not here."

"Ar d'yer mean 'e's not 'ere," cried the other contemptuously. "Thi is 'is stall, isn't it? Think I don't know it!"

"Ay, but"—Mr. Oakroyd fumbled, then hurried on—"you see, I'v bowt it off on him."

"Oh, since when?"

"Yesterda'," replied Mr. Oakroyd. "I took it on mesen, so you won' find him here, mate."

Mr. Summers looked puzzled. Not being a man of intellect, h took some time to arrange his ideas. Then suddenly he shook himself, banged the stall again, and shouted: "'E's been seen 'ere thi morning. You bought this? You've 'ell as like, yer rotten little liar.

"Here, here, here, here! Less of it, less of it. What's it all abou eh?" This was the policeman with the ginger moustache, the one wh apparently did not like markets and fairs. Now he looked very sever indeed.

"I come 'ere asking for a feller," growled Summers, "and this felle 'ere says 'e don't know where the feller is and says that this stall 'ere is 'i and I was telling 'im it wasn't 'cos I knew it belonged to this other felle d'yer see?"

"Well, I don't see what you've got to make such a lot of noise about said the policeman. "Either it's his or it isn't, and one way or the othe it don't seem to me to be much o' your business."

"I was only telling 'im I knew it wasn't, d'yer see?"

"All right, all right, I know what you was doing," cried the polic man angrily. "And I say it don't seem to me to be much o' your bus ness."

"That's right," Mr. Oakroyd put in, feeling it was about time he sai mething. It was, however, a very unfortunate move. The policeman, ho up to now had been eyeing Summers very suspiciously, transferred s unpleasant stare to Mr. Oakroyd himself, who did not find it easy meet it.

“Well, it may be none of his business,” said the policeman, still star-g, “but it’s my business all right. If you ask me, there’s something bit queer here. Now you say this here outfit belongs to you and ot to this other feller he’s talking so much about?”

“Ay,” replied Mr. Oakroyd, hesitating. “In a manner o’ speaking, u might say——”

“What d’you mean ‘in a manner o’ speaking’?” the policeman de-anded. “ ’Ere, let’s have a look at your licence.”

Mr. Oakroyd stared back at the policeman, open-mouthed. He knew thing about licences, had no idea what a licence would look like, how uch it cost, where it would be obtained. All that he did know, with a kening certainty, was that he ought to have a licence, if his story were be believed, and that he could not think how to begin to explain why hadn’t one.

“ ’E’s got no licence,” said Summers triumphantly.

“Who’s talking to you?” the policeman demanded angrily. Then turned to Mr. Oakroyd again and repeated, with maddening delib-ation, “Let’s have a look at your licence.”

Fortunately for Mr. Oakroyd, the policeman’s high-handed methods ere too much for Jim Summers, whose temper was always uncertain d who disliked the Force. At that moment he might have been mpared to a smoking volcano. He pushed his face between the other o, and repeated, very slowly and ominously, “I said ‘ ’E’s got no ence.’ ”

“And I say ‘Who’s talking to you?’ ” cried the policeman, giving him push. “You get back a bit.”

“And oo the bloody ’ell d’you think you are?” shouted Summers, ising a huge fist. “Touch me again, yer ginger pig, and I’ll flatten r.”

“Another word and you’ll come along with me,” retorted the police-an, stepping back.

"'Ello, 'ello! What's the row?" It was Joby, and with him was short, thick-set, smiling man.

At the sight of Joby's companion, Summers gave a roar. "Muss, ye ——" He rushed at him but both Joby and the policeman thre themselves in the way, and the next moment they were all so man whirling arms and legs. Instantly the crowd surged round and it pressure drove them against the stall, which rocked with the figh Mr. Oakroyd, at the other side and cut off from the combatants, coul do nothing but try to keep the stall in place. A shower of rubber bir and monkeys descended upon the battlefield. *Crack!* went the sta and another shower of dolls fell, so that Mr. Oakroyd began sweepin those that were left into the boxes at the back, and then, crawling u derneath, contrived to pick up a number of those that had fallen. H returned to hold on and sway with the stall. He had undertaken " mind t'stall"—as he told himself—and what he could do, he did. The was no room for him in the fight, even if he had wished to join it. T redoubtable Summers, having sent little Tommy Muss into the du given Joby a black eye, and battered the policeman, was now bein overpowered. The policeman had had time to blow his whistle, whi brought his colleague from the other end of the market-place, and t two of them secured the person of James Summers and finally march him away, followed by the cheers and hoots of the crowd.

Mr. Oakroyd immediately came round to the front of the stall a began picking up the remainder of the fallen toys, while Joby and friend gasped and swore and wiped their faces and dusted their cloth

"'Ere, didn't take any names, did 'e?" asked Joby, still panting breath.

"He didn't take mine," said Mr. Oakroyd.

"We're off then. What d'yer say, Tommy? If they wants us the witness-box, they must find us, see. 'Ere, get this stuff away, sh as yer can. Come on, Tommy. That's right, George. Sharp's word, or we'll never do it. But they've got ter get 'im ter the stati see." He turned to look at those members of the crowd that w still lingering about. "Nar then," he cried, "it's all over this ti No more performances today, people. Out o' the way, you lads." A the linoleum merchant and the friend of Mr. Walters of Bristol, taki lvantage of the fact that a crowd was already assembled at their el- ows, roared out their patter again and drew all but the most obstinate the spectators into their audiences.

“I'll get the van, see,” said Joby, “and run it as near as I can, just und the Johnny Horner. Soon as yer 'ear me toot, run with as much the stuff as yer can carry. Get the stall down, George, and anything at's broken bad, leave it.” And he hurried off.

“A troublesome business, Mr. Muss,” boomed a voice above them they packed the things.

“ 'Lo Professor!” said Tommy, looking up. “ 'Ow goes it? We're slid- g out.”

“Quite right, quite right, Mr. Muss,” replied the Professor. “I should the same myself, have done before today. Very inconvenient these lice-court affairs. Besides, if you go into the box, it creates a prejudice ainst you in the profession. Not that Summers doesn't deserve what- er he gets—a hooligan, a tough, Mr. Muss—these low types are a grace to the road. They can't carry their beer, that's the trouble.”

There goes the old van,” cried Tommy. “Now then, Professor, u don't know us, do you?”

I've never seen you in my life before,” the Professor replied gravely. nd I'll drop a word to the boys. Summers won't give names, of urse, because you'd be hostile witnesses, though I doubt if he's the se to see that. I'll keep an eye on these things for you.”

Two hurried journeys each were enough. Mr. Oakroyd was hustled o the back, the other two sitting in front; and they rattled out of bsden as fast as the van would take them. Mr. Oakroyd had no idea ere they were going and his backward vision of the town and the d that followed it told him nothing. The long day, the excitement the fight, the hasty departure, had left him rather tired, and after first few dramatic minutes of the escape from Ribsden he gradually k into a doze, lying full length on one of the bunks. When, finally, y stopped and he struggled out, he had not the faintest notion of the tance they had come or the time they had been on the road. He nd they were standing in a long village street, outside a small public- se. The landlord came to the door.

The wife in, Joe?” cried Tommy.

"Yuss, she is. 'Ad 'er tea some time back, though," replied the lan
lord.

"Tell 'er I'm 'ere. 'Alf a minute, though, I'm coming in." An
Tommy, giving a wink to the other two, went inside.

Joby passed the wink on to Mr. Oakroyd with the undamaged ey
"Tommy's got the tart in there," he remarked. "Been there two day
see. 'E came into Ribsden on chance of finding me there, but didn
think 'e'd find Jim Summers there. What 'appened, George?"

Mr. Oakroyd related his adventures with Mr. Summers and the officiou
policeman, and when he had done, Tommy emerged from the publi
house, followed by a gaudy youngish woman several inches taller tha
himself.

"What-how, Jowby!" she cried, waving a hand. "All the best! I wis
I'd bin there to see. 'E's got what 'e wanted, 'asn't 'e, the swine
Gor!—but you got an eye. You want a bit o' stike on thet eye, down
'e, Tommy? Come in and 'ave one while I getcher a bit o' stike."

"What about it, Joby?" added Tommy. "Coming in now? Th
old box of tricks be all right there."

"No, I'll pull 'er out, Tommy, and find a place for 'er. Going
kip in 'er tonight, see. 'Sides, me and George'll 'ave to see what t
damage is and try to straighten up if we're working that place tomorre
See yer later, Tommy."

"I'll be 'ere," said Tommy.

"Get in front, George," said Joby, climbing in again. And off the
went down the long street. "Tommy's joining up again tomorrer, se
and the tart's follering on, doing the palm business. She's all rig
but a 'ole night with the two of them together—with 'er sitting on
knee and slapping 'im and drinking 'is beer—'ud get on my rud
nerves."

"I dare say. She looks nowt i' my line," Mr. Oakroyd remark
dispassionately.

Joby halted at the last shop in the village, where he bought so
food, and then they found a camping place by the side of the roa
about a mile outside the village. There they repeated the program
of the previous evening, examining and putting in order the sto
and the stall and then having a meal. But this time Joby went to t

blic-house, the one in which Tommy and his temporary bride were ying, unaccompanied by Mr. Oakroyd, who said that he was too ed to move. It was true he was tired, but he was also feeling rather t of it. Joby's pal had come back, and now, he knew, he was not lly wanted. Tomorrow he would have to go on alone. "Nay, I'll t to bed, Joby lad," he said, and watched him walk down the road, ck to the village, but neither saw nor heard anything of Joby's return, o hours later, so deep was this, his second—and probably his last— ght of sleep in a caravan, with only a three-ply breadth between him d the stars.

V

ell, George," said Joby, the next morning, "yer done me a good turn two, see. I'd like to keep yer on the job a bit longer, but yer see it is. And this oughter straighten us up a bit." And he handed over extremely dirty bit of paper that turned out, much to Mr. Oakroyd's prise, to be a pound note.

Nay, I don't know as how I can tak' this," he said doubtfully. ou've given me summat to eat and sup and a bed like, and I've done wt to earn this."

Yer the first West Riding feller I ever knew to look sideways at hat do you Tykes call it?—a bit o' brass. Nar then, George, put in yer pocket."

nd Mr. Oakroyd did put it in his pocket and even tried to mumble e words of thanks, an agonising task to any true Bruddersfordian, always tries to arrange his life so that he will be spared such lling scenes. Mr. Oakroyd himself had always regarded with suson any persons—not counting affected southrons and the like— showed a readiness to say "Please" and "Thank you," and was uinely troubled afterwards by the thought that perhaps his travels already sapping his manly independence and might lead him to lge—as he said himself—"in all sorts o' daft tricks."

nd I'll tell yer what, George," Joby continued, "if yer've found ing, get a lift to Nottingham next week—Thursday, Friday, Saty—Goose Fair, and take a look round for me and Tommy, see. All boys'll be there, and I might be able to find something for yer.

Good tradesman, eh, George? 'Andle a saw, every time, eh? That' the stuff. Don't ferget, Nottingham."

"Ay, if I've nowt on, I will."

"Good enough! What's the ruddy move now then, George? W can give yer a lift on the way, can't we? What say?"

Mr. Oakroyd shook his head decisively. "Nay, you go one way an I'll go t'other. You've had enough bother wi' me. Where do this her road go to?"

"'Alf a minute, 'alf a minute." Joby scratched his head, looked the road, frowned at it, then scratched his head again. "Tommy fetche me 'ere—ter call at 'is boozer—but I been 'ere before. I've been ever where, I 'ave. Yer can't lose me. I know, George, I know. 'Er go down this road, keep round to the left—'bout six miles—and yer come to a place called Rawsley. Biggish place—twenty or thirty booze there—good 'uns some of 'em. A feller called Thompson—Jimm Thompson—used to keep one—knew 'im well, used to be a welt weight, and tidy with 'em, too. That's the place—Rawsley. Th 'ave a fair third week in July—not so bad, neither—best round 'e Yer might easy pick something up there, see. 'Ave a look at Rawsl George."

Mr. Oakroyd brought his basket trunk and his bag of tools out of t van and then stood waiting for Joby to come out too. It was qu late in the morning and there was every indication now that the f autumn weather they had been having had at last come to an e There had been rain earlier on, and though it was fine now, the was overclouded and it was much colder than it had been. It the wrong kind of day on which to go off on your own again; the r looked cheerless, the whole prospect forlorn. "A poor do," thou Mr. Oakroyd, waiting to say good-bye.

When Joby did come out he brought with him a little package loo wrapped in brown paper. "Yer'll want these, George," he said. " don't pass nothing on the way to Rawsley, see." He handed over package. "Sandwiches—our own ruddy make," he explained, look almost apologetic. "If yer don't want 'em, give 'em to the poor, Geo give 'em to the poor, but for God's sake don't start arguing the about 'em."

“All right, Joby lad, I won’t,” said Mr. Oakroyd, putting on his old ackintosh and stuffing the sandwiches into the pocket. “And I hope I e thee agen afore so long.” He held out his hand, feeling that he ight go to any lengths now after such a desperately emotional speech. Joby shook it enthusiastically. “Well, George, I’ll tell yer someing. Yer the best Yorkshire lad I’ve met for a long time. I’m not nd of ’em as a rule, see. I don’t get on with ’em.”

“Ay,” replied Mr. Oakroyd gravely, “we tak’ a bit o’ knowing.”

“But you’re all right, George, you are,” Joby continued, persisting ith this imaginary Christian name to the very end. “And any time r want to find me, just drop me a line to *The World’s Fair*—that’s r paper, see—Joby Jackson, care of *The World’s Fair*. That’ll find all right every time. So long, George, and all the best!”

Half a mile down the road a spatter of rain overtook Mr. Oakroyd, d at the end of the next half-mile it was raining in good earnest, so t he thought it wiser to shelter under some trees. He sat down his two bags and pulled out his pipe and pouch. But there were y a few crumbs of *Old Salt* left, enough perhaps for one small pipe, he wisely decided that this was not the time to smoke them. “I n save ’em till I’ve had summat to eat,” he told himself. He sat re in his chill and glistening mackintosh, forlornly watching the drops dance on the road and an occasional faded leaf flutter down is feet. A postman on a bicycle went past, then a large closed car; that was all the traffic there was. Try as he might, Mr. Oakroyd ld not drown a little voice that kept asking him if he had not a fool to leave home and wander about like this. True, he was er off than he had been two mornings ago, for then he had had ing at all and now he had a pound. But what was a pound? what was he to do now? There weren’t many Jobys about. This ght brought him closer to the heart of his melancholy. It was joyous reunion of Joby and his pal Tommy that had really made feel so desolate. Joby had been a good sort but he didn’t want Jess Oakroyd, not after his own pal had come back. Nobody ed him, except Lily, who was far away in Canada, and even she ’t seem to mind their not being together. There wasn’t a chap uddersford who would care twopence where Jess Oakroyd was and what had happened to him. Even Sam Oglethorpe wouldn't bothe his head five minutes about him. And his own wife and son wer glad to be rid of him. And yet he was a friendly chap really, onl too willing to put in a good bit of hard work for somebody and the have his pipe and pint afterwards with a mate or two. At least, so i seemed to him, but as he thought it over and over, in a dragging an dreary fashion, his mind grew shadowy and fearful with doubt. Pe haps there was something wrong with him. But now his feet touche solid ground and he sprang up, erect. "There's nowt wrong wi' me he declared sturdily. "I'll ha' summat to eat."

He pulled out the sandwiches and, remembering how Joby had give them to him, he felt a little more cheerful. As he munched awa the sun came struggling through again and the rain dwindled to few glittering drops. The road looked more inviting now than t chill damp shade of the trees, and he hurried through his little me lit the last shreds of *Old Salt,* then walked out into the sunlight. H was wandering on again. The thought brought him a tiny thrill pleasure now. As he trudged down the road, he mused upon that fi fine clatter down the Great North Road, the Kirkworth Inn, M Poppleby and Joby and the Professor and the rubber dolls. Th images were still popping in and out of his mind when he reached crossroads and saw that the signpost to the left pointed to Rawsl As he turned down this new road, a sudden excitement took possessi of him. He even stopped, put down his bags, took the pipe out of mouth, and spoke aloud.

"Eh," he cried, "but I've seen summat this week. I've had a bit fun on me travels if I never see nowt no more."

Perhaps that began it all. They were brave words, manfully spo from the heart, and we do not know how far such words may tr nor what they may set in motion. A minute or two later, he tur a corner and saw that the length of road before him was empty ex for a single stationary object some distance away. It was a s car. He walked towards it, leisurely, incuriously. He did not k that this was to be, for him, no ordinary car, that he was casu crossing the threshold of another world.

Chapter Five

MISS TRANT IS ALMOST A SECOND COLUMBUS

I

THE car was the same two-seater Mercia that had carried Miss Trant so bravely out of Hitherton four days before. It was not perhaps same Elizabeth Trant, certainly not the one Hitherton had known. e had been running about, discovering England, all by herself; march- into hotels and demanding beds and breakfasts and dinners and ches; talking about roads and cars and cathedrals to strangers, mostly n. This was something. Indeed, after you had lived with the lonel for twenty years at Hitherton, it was a great deal, a wild rush ndependent life. But it was nothing—mere touristry—compared with other adventures. The little car had taken her further than the st distant cathedral, the loneliest hotel. It had plumped her into middle of other people's lives, the most fantastic places in the ld. She had not forsworn her allegiance to the historical romance nd had read two out of the four she carried with her—but now regarded its figures with a different eye, meeting its conspirators and oons on something like terms of equality. Indeed, she could afford ity them, for though they had to grapple with all the urgencies ife they appeared to have been denied all but a crumb or so from ast stores of comic relief. She was beginning to feel now that she v both.

ter the first splendid hour or two of escape, Monday had not been xciting day. Ely, she found, was just fifteen miles too far, so stayed that night in Cambridge—a town she had visited before—*he Lion* in Petty Cury. Term had not yet begun and the little town, which she remembered as a riot of rowing enthusiasts, n mayonnaise, ices, and lawns lit with Chinese lanterns, was now pleasantly empty, only engaged in decking out its windows with a ne stock of caps and gowns and college ties and tobacco jars. She ha a little stroll before dinner, ate heartily, then sipped her coffee in th glass-covered lounge, which pleased her because it reminded her being on board ship. By this time, she was eager to talk to somebod and did her best with her neighbour, a large upholstered sort woman who stared straight in front of her, above a magnificent Rom nose.

"I find it more tiring than I thought it would be, driving by onese I mean," explained Miss Trant.

"Do you?" said the other, in her deep contralto voice.

"Perhaps it's because there's nobody to share things with," Miss Tr continued, eagerly, "all the little difficulties and dangers and triump you know."

"Indeed!" The woman still stared straight in front of her.

"It may be because I'm inexperienced, of course," Miss Trant falter It was not easy to talk to this nose.

"I dare say," said the other, achieving her very lowest notes but moving a muscle of her face.

Miss Trant looked at her and wondered sadly why people sho be so unfriendly. The next moment, however, the woman's face up and she jumped to her feet with surprising agility. A boy ab eighteen had just entered the lounge, obviously her son. The wom had not been unfriendly but simply absent-minded. Miss Trant relieved. She looked about her again, only to meet the gaze of man opposite, a man with protruding grey eyes, admirably adapted staring fixedly at strangers, and a heavy greying moustache that fondled as if it were a privilege to have access to such a creat She made the mistake of meeting his stare very frankly. It brou him over to the vacated chair at her side.

"Mind if I sit here?" he enquired, in a thick voice.

"Not at all," said Miss Trant, looking hard at the chair he had left.

"Thanks. Awfully quiet here, isn't it?" he continued, his eyes bul at her.

"Is it?"

"Well, dontcher think so? I know this place pretty well, come here ree or four times a year, you know. Not much to do here in the ening, specially if the boys aren't up. Usually drop into the pictures yself."

She may have led a quiet life, but she was no fool. There was no istaking his doggish inviting air. And a minute or two ago, she had en telling herself that people were too unfriendly. And now—this. was too absurd. She wanted to laugh, and some little sound must ve made its way out.

'Pardon," and the man leaned forward.

Her amusement somehow brought her into command of the situation. e fixed her eyes upon the heavy moustache, as if it were a curious iseum exhibit, and remarked: "I was wondering if all the men in my nily had decided to go to the pictures. I'm waiting for them now, l they're late."

Oh, waiting for them, are you?" There was a change in his tone.

Yes," she continued hastily. "My father, my two brothers, my hus- id, and our two boys. Quite a crowd of them. They're awfully ."

Ie stared at her, but it was quite a different stare. "Yes, time's ting on, isn't it?" he mumbled. He pretended to look at his watch. me I was moving on." And he moved.

Ie left Miss Trant wondering at herself, at her impudence, her rage, her staggering presence of mind. She felt as if she were a oolgirl again and yet a woman of the world, though no woman of world, she reflected, would have ever stooped to such a ridiculous n-form trick. Something—money or freedom or both—had changed She wanted to unbosom herself to somebody very badly now, he wrote a long letter to Dorothy Chillingford. Then she went ed.

ext morning, about eleven o'clock, she was at Ely, enraptured by dramatic splendours of the cathedral. It was at the top of the er that she made the acquaintance of the fierce little elderly man, rently the only other visitor there. He had very bright eyes, pink ks, a bristling beard, and one of those old-fashioned turned-down rs that always suggest that their wearers are William Morris socialists or vegetarians or leaders of surprising little religious sects. Sh never learned which of these he was, never knew his name, busines or place of address; but nevertheless they were soon on very friend terms. It was impossible that they should be silent when they we standing on the high tower together, looking down upon the sun plain of Cambridgeshire. He had a map with him and insisted up pointing out to her every landmark on the horizon. Then they explor the rest of the cathedral together, and she found him a most learn and entertaining companion, in spite of his staccato dogmatic mann "Do you know anything about brasses? You don't, eh? Then I explain." And he would explain, and he hurried her from one p of the building to another, explaining. Miss Trant felt sometimes if she were back at school, but it was impossible not to like him.

Both of them, it appeared, had left their cars outside *The Lan* so they walked back there together and shared a table for lunch. was during this meal that Miss Trant let fall a remark that was so consequence because it led to a change in her programme.

"Isn't it a pity we can't build like that now, make really beauti things?"

"No pity at all!" he cried, putting down his fork. "We can; do. My dear young lady, don't you believe that stuff. All rubbi The world progresses. We can build when we want to. I don't we build anything like Ely here—we don't want to—not our styl all wonder that, cultivated by barbarism, no knowledge of the unive in it—but I say we can build as well, can build better. Look at new County Hall in London. Have you seen it? Look at the B Building. Have you seen that? Have you seen that enormous bl of offices near London Bridge? You must get that idea out of y head at the earliest possible moment, you really must, if you'll for my saying so. You say you are going round looking at the cathed —that's the plan isn't it? Well, have you seen Liverpool?"

No, she had not seen Liverpool.

"Go to Liverpool at once," he commanded, and was so impres that she felt she ought to hurry away that very moment. He wa bad as Mr. Chillingford. And what a pair they would make!

"Now you can't say I'm not interested in these medieval creatio continued earnestly. “You can't say I don't appreciate them. This rning you probably thought I was a little too interested and ap- ciative, the way I dragged you round and talked your head off. But Liverpool there's a brand-new cathedral, finished the other day—so speak. Not a town-hall or a railway station or a block of offices, a cathedral, the very thing you're talking about.”

He paused to take breath, and Miss Trant, who was reminded a le of her father, regarded him with friendly amusement.

Now what's it like, this cathedral? Is it a little shuffling jerry- lt hotch-potch thing? It is not. It's large, it's solid, it's enduring. beautiful, it's sublime. And who made it? The men of today. n't be misled by this medieval nonsense. We're better men than y were, and we live in a better world. Building was their chief k; it's not ours; but when we want to build, we can outbuild 'em. u never give a thought to most of our building,” he lectured away, ever taking up his fork and then putting it down again. “Take big liners—there's building for you. Look at one of 'em.” He this as if there were several just outside the window. “There's ptation to ends, there's beauty of design, there's solid craftsmanship workmanship, everything there in a big liner. You go to Liver- l, look at the cathedral, then take a peep or two at some of the rs in dock, and you'll soon change your mind about our building. u were going there anyhow, I suppose?”

Miss Trant found herself compelled to say, untruthfully, that she . It would have been terrible to have told him that she had never n thought about Liverpool; he would never have eaten any lunch.

Then go there at once, my dear young lady,” he replied, eager as a . “See it before this nonsense takes root in your mind. I insist n your going there next. It's only a pleasant day's run from here. show you on the map after lunch.” And he fell to gobbling his h, he was so anxious to have done with it and to show her the .

Miss Trant sat there, eating daintily, and envying his complete ab- tion in the matter in hand. It might be babyish, but it must be t fun, she thought, to be swallowed up by things like that. She d as well go to Liverpool as to Lincoln or York, and she decided she would go there, if only to please him. It would, too, be friendly gesture towards the eagerly-forgetting-all-about-yourself, whi only needed what she determined now to call “a swallower.” Buildin and anti-medievalism and progress were apparently all swallowers f this old gentleman, now galloping rather noisily through his blackber tart. Perhaps she had served other people’s swallowers too long; was time she had one of her own. But then there might be one waiti for her at Liverpool.

“Here you are then,” cried the old gentleman enthusiastically, poi ing to the map. “Huntingdon, Kettering, Leicester, Derby, Maccl field, Warrington, Liverpool. Almost a straight run across country.’

She examined the route carefully. It seemed to take her through number of industrial towns, places with trams and lorries and narr main streets. “Will there be a lot of traffic?” she enquired dubiou

“Traffic! What’s wrong with traffic? Why, I can give you thi years, but I like traffic. The more traffic the better. I like to se place bustling, alive. It does me good to drive through a town th got some trade. It’s—it’s inspiring. You’re not going to tell me t you’re frightened of traffic.”

“Yes I am,” she said firmly. “I don’t like it at all. If I’d m experience, I might not mind it so much, but as it is, I’m terrifi I never know which side I ought to pass a tram on, and when great lumbering things look as if they’re going to pin me betw them I can’t possibly console myself by thinking the town is v busy.”

“Pass them on any side. I do.” He waved an arm carelessly. like these little problems of driving. They keep me young. In out, in and out, stop, go on, in and out again—nothing pleases better. It will you soon, too, you mark my words. But you’ve noth to be afraid of on this route.” And he went over the route again, made such a fuss about it and was so friendly and absurd that felt herself compelled to fall in with his plan.

“But I can’t go all that way today, of course,” she told him.

“Perhaps not, perhaps not,” he cried, rather testily. Then he his finger over the map. “You could get as far as Macclesfield,’ finally announced.

She looked for herself. "Leicester would be quite far enough for ."

"Leicester! A stone's-throw, a mere stone's-throw! You could have there, then run on to Macclesfield. That's the place obviously."

Miss Trant shook her head. She did not see why she should be dic- ed to in this fashion. "I shall have done quite enough by the time each Leicester."

My dear young lady, I don't believe you can read a map, I really 't believe you can. You're talking nonsense, you know." He ned quite irritated. "You couldn't have an easier run than to Maccles- d."

he smiled at him. "Yes, I could, and I'm going to. Just as far as cester."

It's ridiculous," he exploded. He slapped the map angrily with his n hand. "Really, you know, you're not *trying*. It's most annoying way you're not trying."

Ier only reply to this absurd protest was a little peal of laughter. e whole idiocy of the situation burst upon her. "I'm sorry," she ered at last.

So am I," he ejaculated. "Very." And he marched out of the dining- n and banged the door behind him.

he door at the other end of the room then opened to admit the l of the waiter. "Did the gentleman call?" he enquired.

No, I don't think he did," she replied. "He went out."

he waiter withdrew and had no sooner closed his door than the r opened and the old gentleman marched in again. He walked ght up to her, looking pinker and more bristling than ever. "I your pardon, my dear young lady, I really beg your pardon," he earnestly. "Most stupid of me. You must go as far as you like stay where you like, of course. It's no business of mine at all, ?" Then he smiled and turned himself into a very charming old leman indeed. "But you will go to Liverpool sometime, won't you, remember what I said?"

This very day," said Miss Trant, and they became more friendly ever.

e never learned his name, and after a time remembered nothing of him but a voice and vague patch of pink cheek and bristling beard but she always believed afterwards that it was he who really began all by hurling her across country towards Liverpool. If he had n insisted upon her going there, she would say, nothing would ev have happened, thereby forgetting that she had been busy turning he self into one of those persons round whom things always happen, an also forgetting, as we all do, that the one road we have chosen o of a hundred is not the only road lined with adventure. Perhaps s was right, however, in saying that the particular adventures she d have were really set in motion by the nameless old gentleman who sh her across the map. But she never arrived at Liverpool, and to th day has never even caught a glimpse of the town of Macclesfield.

II

She spent Tuesday night at Market Harborough. The next mornin she ran through Leicester, or rather lost herself in what seemed a nigh mare of traffic and unlabelled streets and then miraculously found h way out of it, pushed on through Derby, and by lunch-time was o in the rising open country beyond. She came to a village clustered abo an important junction of roads, and saw at the corner a pleasant lit hotel that promised lunch. There were two cars already drawn up b fore the front door, but she was able to slip in between them. It w then she noticed that the car in front seemed exactly like her ow the same kind of two-seater and painted an identical light blue. S entered the hotel wondering idly what sort of people owned this tw car.

There were only two persons having lunch. Miss Trant was given small table in the opposite corner, but as the dining-room was quite na row she was not far away from her fellow lunchers. They were curious pair. The woman was about her own age, a large square blon with a wandering nose and a mouth that was so big, so loose, and vividly and inhumanly carmined, that it seemed to have no connecti with the rest of the face, to be a dreadful afterthought. She was chea but showily dressed, a jangling sort of woman, and she talked ve quickly and loudly and was evidently in nervous high spirits. H companion was nervous but not in high spirits. He was a neat co ressed little man, with dark hair parted in the middle, pince-nez above button of a nose, and tiny moustache. He looked vaguely uneasy. iss Trant told herself that he reminded her of a rabbit.

Before Miss Trant had finished her soup, there were sounds of other rrivals outside, and in a few minutes four men, three stout and one hin, clomped in and seated themselves at the other end of the room.

The large blonde woman, who was halfway through her lunch, had een fussing some time with a heavy coat. Now she stood up, took it ff, and exclaimed, in a curious mincing accent apparently assumed or everybody's benefit: "This cowt's an orful nuisance. I'll have it et in the caw." She looked about for the waitress, but the waitress as ostentatiously busying herself with the men's table, so she walked ut with the coat herself, obviously enjoying the little fuss she was aking, and returned in a moment.

"All ri'?" enquired her companion, in a weak high voice that was xactly what you expected from him.

"I told the man to pet it in the caw, deear," replied the woman, reeating herself and attacking the boiled mutton with an indescribable air f luxurious pleasure.

Miss Trant had just decided that she had watched and wondered at is odd pair long enough, when the telephone bell rang. The telehone was in the dining-room, and the waitress answered it. Everybody lse looked at her and listened intently, finding it impossible, as usual, o be indifferent to a telephone.

"Yes it is," cried the waitress through the mouthpiece. "That's right." hen she listened. "How should I know?" She listened again. "Like hat?" she asked, frowning. "Oh, I see." And then her glance went avelling round the room and finally rested on the odd pair. It was very xciting as nobody even pretended to eat. "Well, I don't know," said the aitress dubiously, still looking the same way. Miss Trant shot a glance ere too, and noticed that the little man seemed very restive. "I dare y it might be," the waitress continued, "but why don't you give the ame. I'll ask if you give me the name. All right. Hold on a minute." he put down the receiver and called out to the little man: "Beg our pardon, but are you Mr. Tipstead? Mr. Eric Tipstead?"

Miss Trant saw him start up involuntarily, saw the woman give him a sharp warning glance, lay a hand on his arm, and give a lightning shake of her head. "No, no," the woman cried hastily, too hastily.

"It isn't, eh?" the waitress called out.

"No—er—certainly not," the man quavered in anything but a tone of certainty. He seemed desirous of appearing as if he were not really very sure just then what his name might be.

The woman, however, had no such subtle reservations in her manner. "Johnson's the name, Miss—Johnson," she cried. She evidently shared with the waitress a conviction that it was more polite to talk about "the name" than to say "your name" or "our name."

"Perhaps she had worked in an hotel too," Miss Trant told herself. She had missed nothing of this.

"Not the name," the waitress informed the telephone. Then after a pause: "Well, I can't help that, can I?" The tone in which she said this suggested that it was no business of hers if her patrons chose to tell lies, though she had her own private opinion of them. Then she replaced the receiver and hurried out with her tray.

Miss Trant was now positive that the little man, the very uneasy little man, was Mr. Eric Tipstead. To begin with, he looked exactly like a Mr. Eric Tipstead. Then she was certain she had heard the woman addressing him as "Eric deear." And why should he have started up when he heard the name, why should the woman have restrained him? Johnson too! Nothing could be less convincing. Johnson was mere impudence.

She kept her eye on them. They were now eating away for dear life, wanting to get away as soon as they could but equally determined to have their three shillings' worth each if it choked them. In another five minutes they were hurrying out, and Miss Trant heard a car give a familiar gasp or two, then a rattle, then a roar immediately afterwards. Never had a car sounded so guilty; there was nervous apprehension in every diminishing hoot. Miss Trant was left to ponder the mystery of Mr. Eric Tipstead and his partner, without whom the dining-room was very commonplace, just so much boiled mutton and treacle pudding, so many fat men and whisky advertisements. She was aching to ask the waitress what had been said to her on the telephone, but even in her new character of independent woman, who dashed from Ely to iverpool and stalked in and out of hotels, she could not do it. The waitess herself trotted about, looking as if she could tell a tale if she wanted o, and she had dropped some remark that had made the four men oar with laughter. It was most irritating. Miss Trant did not bolt er lunch Tipstead fashion, but on the other hand she did not linger ver it as long as she might have done. And she gave the waitress only ourpence, instead of sixpence.

There were at least half-a-dozen cars and vans standing outside the ront of the hotel now, but she was astonished to find that her own ar was not there at all. She stood on the threshold, staring in bewilderment. Then she walked round the assembled cars. It was not here.

"I'm looking for my car," she explained to a man who was hanging bout the door. "I left it here."

"Ar," said the man, looking wise. "Blue two-seater was it?"

She replied, eagerly, that it was.

"Ar. It's round the corner 'ere. 'Ad to shift one of 'em about 'alf an our ago." And he led the way round the corner.

There it was, much to her relief. She climbed in, and was about o start the engine when she noticed there was something strange about he dashboard, something strange indeed about the whole interior.

"All right, miss?" the man asked.

"All wrong. This isn't my car." She got out and looked at it.

"Then whose car is it?" the man, anxious to be helpful, walked round he car after her.

"I don't know whose car it is, I only know it isn't mine. It's like it ut it isn't it. I'm afraid that sounds ridiculous. Well, I suppose my ar must be about somewhere."

The man began to stare at her and as he stared his mouth slowly pened.

"I remember now," she went on, not bothering about him, for he eemed very stupid. "This car was in front of mine when I went n to lunch. I noticed that it seemed extraordinarily like mine. Yes, his is the one." She broke off; it was impossible to talk to that fish-ke stare. "What's the matter?"

"They took it," the man said slowly.

"Who took what? Do you mean my car? Did some one mistak it for this? I know. Was it——" she hesitated.

"About 'alf an hour ago," the man put in. "Just after I'd 'ad t move this. A couple comes dashing out, gets in, goes off without word. Smallish feller with eye-glasses, it was. His wife picks up big coat that's lying over the side, puts it on, and then they're off wit out a word."

"The Tipsteads!" cried Miss Trant.

"I beg yer pardon, Miss."

"That's the name of the people who took it, or at least I think it i Tipstead."

"If 'e was that by name, 'e wasn't that by nature," the man observe rather bitterly. "As I say, 'e gives me nothing for my trouble but go off without a word. And then 'e goes and takes the wrong car, seem ingly. Now if 'e'd only said something. They were trying it on, you ask me. I says to myself at the time, I says 'you're in a bit a 'urry, aren't you.' Going off like that without a word! I migh 'ave known!"

"But this is absurd," cried Miss Trant. "They've taken my c and now they're miles away. What on earth am I to do?"

"I should take theirs if I was you," said the man with an air of dee cunning.

"But I don't want theirs. They've got all my things. Which wa did they go?"

"Took the north road." And the man pointed.

"I wonder if I could overtake them," she mused. "I suppose I coul drive this one. But how do I know this *is* theirs? It might belon to somebody else."

"That's theirs all right," he replied. "I saw 'em come up in it. It the spit image o' yours, too."

She got into the car again, started it up, and ran it backwards an forwards once or twice. It was as easy to handle as her own, and wa indeed a twin Mercia. Finally, she reversed it round to the front the hotel, with the vague idea of consulting the landlord. At th moment a motorcycle came tearing up to the hotel. It stopped just a she stopped.

"Where is he, where is he?" cried a very angry feminine voice.
Vhere is he?—you—you——" here it choked a little—"you big vamp,
u!"

Miss Trant looked round and was astonished to find that the furious
tle woman who had just jumped out of the sidecar was screaming
her. "What on earth are you talking about?" she cried.

The woman was even more astonished. As she stared, her face
l. "Oo, I'm sorry." She was now joined by the young man who had
smounted from the motorcycle. "This isn't her, Willy," she wailed.
en she looked at the car, and her eyes grew round and her mouth
ened. "This is our car, isn't it, Willy? I'm sure it is."

Willy, a very stolid young man, looked it over carefully and an-
unced that it was certainly their car.

"I know what he's done," she wailed again. "You needn't tell me.
's gone and sold it. Three hours away and the first thing he does
o sell the car. She's made him sell it."

We'll see about that," said Willy, unmoved. "We can ask, can't
?" And he looked at Miss Trant.

I don't know what you're talking about," said Miss Trant, looking
m one to the other, "but I can assure you this car doesn't belong
me."

Then what are you doing in it?" Willy broke in, rudely.

iss Trant, who was annoyed, gave him a sharp glance. "Please be
et a moment," she commanded. "Otherwise, I can't explain. This
belongs to some people who have just gone off in *my* car."

That's right." This was from the first man, who felt it was time
took charge of the situation. "You see, a party comes out, gets
his lady's car, goes off without a word——"

What sort of party?" asked Willy.

A little-ish feller with eye-glasses——"

Eric!" cried the woman. "I knew it, I knew it. What did I tell you,
ly?"

Sounds like him all right," Willy agreed.

A biggish woman, fair-'aired, 'is wife was," the man continued.

His wife!" The way in which the agitated little woman let loose
e two syllables confirmed Miss Trant. This was Mrs. Eric Tipstead.

She was small and dark, like her husband, but looked altogether mo energetic and purposeful. She was one of those little stringy wom who never seem to tire.

"They left the hotel in rather a hurry," Miss Trant began.

"Yes, I'll bet they did," said Mrs. Tipstead grimly, folding up h mouth.

"And they ran off in my car. That was about half an hour ag

"You hear that, Willy?" cried Mrs. Tipstead. "In for a penny, for a pound. Taking cars now! She goes and makes him take th lady's car right under her nose."

"Hold on, Sis, hold on," Willy put in. "He didn't mean to take you bet. Did he?" And he appealed to Miss Trant and the oth man.

"No, of course he didn't," said Miss Trant.

"It's as easy to explain as anything you could wish for, consideri that is, it's a bit of a mix-up," said the man. And he began an i mense narrative or what would obviously have developed into enormous narrative if Miss Trant had not cut it short by giving a br account of the affair as she saw it.

"There's no doubt this is his car, then?" asked Miss Trant at t end of her story.

"Not a bit. Look, there's his bag." She pointed to the luggage the dicky seat. "And—and—look there, Willy—that's hers." S plucked out the suit-case and flung it down on the road. "The i pudence of it, with a bag and all!" And then, quite suddenly, s prisingly, she burst into tears and had to lean against her brother, w did not support her very tenderly or even adequately. Miss Tra who was still sitting in the car, looked on and felt very foolish.

"What are you going to do then, Sis?" asked Willy, a practical m clearly at a disadvantage.

Some choking sounds from Mrs. Tipstead might have been interpret to mean that she intended to follow her erring husband.

Miss Trant came to the conclusion it was time she intervened. T relations between Mr. and Mrs. Tipstead and the large blonde were business of hers, and the thought of being in any way entangled their affairs made her shudder; but the fact remained that her

d most of her best clothes were being rushed into the North some-
ere by Mr. Tipstead at that very moment. She was confident that
atever he did, he would not return to the hotel with the car. He
st have known that it was his wife who rang up when they were
ing lunch.

The point is," she said clearly and calmly, "do you happen to know
ere these—where Mr. Tipstead is going? The very moment you
e I was just setting out to try and overtake them. The man showed
which road they took. And we're only wasting time, you know."

Yes, I do know," replied Mrs. Tipstead, calmer now. "At least I've
ood idea. If I hadn't, I couldn't have come so far. I got her
ress and they're going there. I found a letter she'd sent him, found
is very morning. I'll bet he doesn't even know he's lost it yet, but
going to know very soon, mark my words. She's got a house at
field, and they're going there."

an you drive this car?"

o, I can't, and that's another thing. Never would let me touch it,
l monkey! Said I might hurt myself! A lot he cared!"

hen you must come with me," said Miss Trant. "That's the
thing to do. If you really think they've gone to this address you
, we must go there, too. I don't want this car of yours and I
inly do want my own and all my things that are in it."

hat's so," said Willy, obviously much relieved. "I'll have to get
anyhow, Sis. You'll get to Sheffield easy before dark, and this
ll look after you."

h, I can look after myself all right," exclaimed Mrs. Tipstead.
l it does seem best, doesn't it, Willy?" Then she turned to Miss
t and suddenly became very stiff and genteel. "I'm sure it's very
of you, Miss—er. I'm Mrs. Tipstead."

y name is Trant."

seemed as if "Very pleased to meet you" was only prevented at
st moment from popping out. Perhaps the absurdity of it in that
ion dawned on Mrs. Tipstead just in time. All she said, after
hesitation, was: "Very—kind indeed of you, Miss Trant." Then
urned aside with her brother.

ss Trant hunted for a map in the car but could not find one, There was one hanging in the hall of the hotel, however, and traced the route to Sheffield on it with her finger. When she retur to the car, she found Mrs. Tipstead sitting in it and staring strai ahead, down the road to the North, like a small damp fury.

It was a fantastic journey. The road crossed the valleys of the D and the Derwent and wound about the lower spurs of the Peak. T ran along green troughs powdered with dust; they sailed up tow great castles of vapour, rosy Himalayas of cloud; they sank thro hollows of blue air cupped round with grass; and all the hills, dales and dingles, the farmhouses came curving to meet them, stea shone or gloomed for a moment, then slipped noiselessly away places in a dream. So it seemed to one part of Miss Trant, which nothing, knew nothing, but this pageantry, went mazed with won flashing a wing, through the golden afternoon. But she was tri and the other two of her were very differently occupied. One busy with the mechanism of the car, and a little dubious of the ma of gears. The other—it was a fair division—had to attend to fel humanity, which was present in the form of Mrs. Tipstead. At Mrs. Tipstead was very stiff, very quiet. Miss Trant did not k what to do with her. It is not easy to make conversation wit strange woman, a woman, moreover, with a social background different from your own, when you are helping her to overtake a away husband. It is all the more difficult when two thirds of are busy elsewhere, up on the hill, down among the gears. Miss T did what she could, however, and very soon Mrs. Tipstead, who not equal to the task of keeping up her stiff genteel manner, be pouring out her confidences.

Miss Trant had murmured something about tea.

"I reely couldn't, you know, Miss Trant," Mrs. Tipstead cried her ear. "I believe a mouthful would choke me. You don't k how I feel, I'm that worked up." There was genuine distress in tones, but there was also a certain melodramatic gusto. Obviously rather like the thought of being choked by a mouthful.

Miss Trant said nothing because there did not seem to be anyt suitable to say. One of those vague little sympathetic noises w have done, but you cannot make them in a car, at least you ca ossibly make them loud enough to be heard. It is not easy, she re-ected, saying anything to some one who confesses to being "worked p." You really ought to shout back: "I hope you'll soon be worked own."

"It's pretty country, isn't it?" Mrs. Tipstead remarked quite unxpectedly. "I've always been fond of this part. I like a bit of nice cenery, don't you? Eric now—my husband—never cared for it much. There, I'm beginning again. I won't say another word." And she hrew herself back against the seat.

"Do go on, unless you really don't want to," said Miss Trant. She wanted to add to this, to say something tactful, sympathetic, but disovered she could not frame a sentence that would suggest the right ttitude, something between brutal indifference and equally brutal curisity.

The other was silent for a minute or two, but her thoughts demanded elief. "I shouldn't have minded half so much," she declared sudenly, "if he'd been honest with me, if he'd had it out with me. But o go sneaking off like that! Just leaving a bit of a note! I shouldn't ave known anything if it hadn't been for that letter she sent him I ound this morning, the one with her address on, this address we're oing to in Sheffield. Not that I didn't know something was going n. I knew that all right. There's no smoke without fire, is there? When me lord's out night after night, I knew there was something on. Business,' he says, leaving me to look after the shop. You see, we've ot a shop—nice little business—sweets and tobacco and newspapers nd fancies—and he does a bit in the insurance line, too, and of course hat does take him out at night. But it never took him out as much s all that. Besides, I could tell the diff'rence—you always can, can't ou?—because he'd try to sneak out and then if I faced him with it, e'd go off in a minute, fairly screaming at me, telling me I didn't nderstand what business was. You always know, don't you, when hey get angry like that about nothing, they're hiding something. It's eir consciences, if you ask me. They know they're doing wrong, silly abies. Well, I pretended not to see. You can't do anything else, n you?"

There was a large car coming towards them, travelling at a great speed almost in the middle of the road, and Miss Trant had to attend to th car. When they had passed it, she found it quite impossible to sett any problem in conjugal tactics. “I don’t know,” she replied.

“No, of course you don’t. I was quite forgetting. Well, I’ve alwa said you’ve got to have it out right at the first, as soon as you notic anything, or you’ve got to leave it alone, keep your dignity, you se And I left it alone, soft thing that I was. And this is what’s happene Catch me doing it again! But I thought I knew him all right.” Sh thought about this for a moment, then went on: “And so I do. It’s he I don’t know. But I’ve heard a few things about her, and if I didn know what I do know, you wouldn’t see me here now. If she’d bee a bit different, he could have had her and welcome. I’ve got my prid But if you ask me, he’s just been dragged into this, couldn’t help himself. She’s said ‘Come’ and he’s gone. I know him.”

She said no more but stared fiercely ahead, down the road that le to Sheffield, where her Eric was waiting to be rescued.

Remembering that odd pair in the dining-room, Miss Trant conclude that this view of the situation was probably the right one. She ha now to transform those vague figures of fun into the real people Mrs. Tipstead’s vehement declarations. It was strange; it was rathe frightening. For the moment she was repelled by the thought of th sheer thrust of life beneath these grotesque surfaces. It would not d She told herself she ought not to feel like that. It was mean, cowardl snobbish perhaps; it was—horrible thought—what people call old-maidish. She had not the slightest desire to be married, and especially this moment, but she shuddered at the idea of being old-maidish. Sh must not mind being jostled by things, by people, by life; she must b ready to take hold herself.

“Only eight miles to Sheffield now,” she announced.

“Do you know, Miss Trant——” Mrs. Tipstead hesitated. “ wouldn’t make any difference, would it?—I mean to getting there i time. But I’m beginning to feel I’d like a cup of tea, if we could fin a nice place. I haven’t had anything since breakfast, and I’m beginnin to feel a bit faint, and I think just a little of something would do m good. What do you think?”

"I'm sure it would," replied Miss Trant heartily. "We'll stop at the next decent place."

They pulled up at a little tea-room and had the place to themselves. Tea meant confidences to Mrs. Tipstead, and as soon as she had poured the first two cups she began the story of her dreadful morning, the note, the discovery of the road, the summoning of her brother Willy, who knew the road and so had suggested telephoning to one or two hotels where the runaways might have halted for lunch. "We didn't do that till we'd started off ourselves, you know," she explained. "From Lichfield, you know. That's where we live."

"Lichfield! Then that's why she said Johnson." Miss Trant felt like Sherlock Holmes, an old favourite of hers. And she had spent hours and hours—it seemed like years—reading Boswell's *Life of Johnson* to the Colonel, whose robust passion for Boswell and Gibbon had now closed the Eighteenth Century to his daughter for ever.

"Who said Johnson?" Mrs. Tipstead stared over the piece of buttered tea-cake she held.

"Why, that woman, when the waitress asked if they were called Tipstead." And she told the story of the telephone call.

"It just shows you, doesn't it?" Mrs. Tipstead was bitterly triumphant. "He'd have never had enough off to do that. But trust her! This isn't the first time, if you ask me. I've heard about her. What's she like?"

Miss Trant gave a brief and unflattering description.

"I thought so. I've never set eyes on her, that's the funny thing. As far as I can make out, she's only been in the place about three or four months, came as a barmaid. She'd been on the stage a bit before that, Willy says. You know the sort. But then I don't suppose you do, Miss Trant, a lady like you. I don't know much about that sort myself, I'm sure, never being one for theatres and going to hotels and all that. That's Eric's style, though, always was. He always thought he could have done well on the stage, and I dare say he could—comic, you know, when he gets going, good as a pantomime. I've laughed sometimes till I've had to tell him to stop. That's what attracted her, I'll be bound, that and his looks. Going there night after night, putting it on a bit and playing the comic, you know, that's what's did it. And me waiting on in the shop, night after night!" She halted between anger and tear "Aren't you ready for another cup, Miss Trant. I'm sure you are."

Miss Trant was not quite ready. She was indeed rather busy tryin to reconcile this Mr. Tipstead, so dashing, so droll, so fascinating to t other sex, with the little rabbit of a man she remembered at the hot

Mrs. Tipstead poured out another cup for herself, and having taste it, plunged into further confidences. "I'll tell you what it was th turned him. I thought it was the best bit of luck we'd ever had whe it happened, but you can never tell how things'll turn out, can you This last March he won a first prize in a competition—five hundre pounds."

"Five hundred pounds!" Miss Trant was genuinely astonished. Sh could not imagine Mr. Tipstead winning a prize of any kind, let alon one of five hundred pounds.

"Five hundred pounds," said the wife, with mournful pride. "Spar lets they were—funny little bits of sayings, you know. He'd been tryin and trying and better trying at it for months, filling in coupons an sending 'em up with a sixpenny postal order every time, till I said 'O for goodness sake, Eric,' I said, 'you might think we're made of post orders. You've wasted enough time and money on them things if yo ask me,' I told him. I knew he was clever at them, but it seemed to m they only took the first they came to and gave 'em prizes and his wer never at the top of the bag. Well, not two weeks after—it was a Tue day afternoon, two young fellows came, one with a camera, and told u he'd got the first prize. They took our photographs—'Mr. and Mr Tipstead receiving the cheque from our representative' they called it— and they put in a long piece about how pleased we were and what w were going to do with the money and all sorts. I wanted him to bu a bigger insurance book with it or move into a bigger shop, but no— he wouldn't have that, and of course I couldn't say anything. He'd wo it, not me. So he must cut a dash with it, buys that car outside ther some new suits of clothes and one thing and another. And what wit getting all this money and having his photograph in the paper and wha he said and having a car, it just turned his head. 'Lord Tipstead' the began calling him down in the town, Willy told me; taking him off you see—though there was a lot of jealousy in it, if you ask me. An f course all these silly girls began making a fuss of him—they've noth-g better to do now, girls haven't. Then this one comes along—regular ome-wrecker, she is, from what I can see, the sort you'd think you'd ever come across off the pictures. Don't you think this butter tastes nny, Miss Trant?"

"It's margarine. I can't eat it."

"I don't blame you. You ought to have another of these cakes. What as I saying? Oh, I'd finished, hadn't I? You really must excuse me, iss Trant, it's so strange meeting you like this and I'm that bewildered day I hardly know what I'm saying. If you met me ordinary times, u wouldn't know me."

There was no reply to this, so Miss Trant put a question instead. Have you any children?"

"I haven't. Not that we haven't wanted them, me especially, and it's een a great trouble to us. Perhaps it's as well as things are turning out, ough you wouldn't be so lonely, would you?" She choked a little, ughed into her handkerchief, drank some tea, and looked tearful.

"Won't you have another cake?" This was very inadequate but it as the best Miss Trant could do at the moment.

"Well, do you think we might halve one between us, I really couldn't t a whole one. No? Well, I won't bother. I'll finish this and then e'll go. Yes, when you're treated like this, you don't know whether to el glad or sorry you haven't any children, you really don't. And when think what I've done for that man! There's nothing I haven't done r him. I've given him my whole life."

These phrases came out too glibly, they were not from the heart, but om the newspapers and the penny novelettes. If Miss Trant had liked e little woman less, she would have let them pass, but now she felt she uldn't. "You know, I'm awfully sorry, Mrs. Tipstead, and I'd like help if I can. And you mustn't think I'm unsympathetic if I say at I never understand what that phrase means—about giving your hole life, you know."

"If you'd been a wife, Miss Trant, you'd know soon enough."

"Well, I haven't, of course. I've only been a daughter. But do you ean that all the time you've been married you've been sacrificing your-lf, never enjoying the life you had together or anything?"

"I've enjoyed nearly every bit of it," cried Mrs. Tipstead warmly. " know Eric's had his faults—a bit extravagant and silly—thoughtless, yo know—but you couldn't want a better husband. I won't say we'v always had the best of luck—we haven't—but we've enjoyed ourselve I can tell you."

"You wouldn't have preferred being single, then?"

"Single! Me!" she cried in horror. "Living by myself, nobody t look after, nobody coming in and out, no bits of jokes and bits of comfort! I may have had a lot to do for him, but I've never begrudged i never, except just lately perhaps, brushing his coats and ironing h trousers so that he could go out and meet that—that—fat painted ba maid. You needn't ask me that, Miss Trant."

"Then you really haven't given your life, you know. You've be living it just as you wanted to live it all the time. I mean, I don't s what more you could have done with it. You don't mind my sayin this, do you?"

Mrs. Tipstead shook her head, then was silent for a minute or tw struggling through into honesty. When at last she spoke, her voi sounded different; it was quieter, more sure of itself. "It's a funny bus ness, isn't it? I've thought a bit about it lately. And I see what y mean. If you do give a lot, it's only because you want to. But i terrible when it's all thrown back in your face. You must wonder wh I'm running after him like this. Of course I'm still fond of him—b I've got my pride the same as anybody else, and perhaps a bit more tha most. But I know Eric, and I've nearly had trouble with him befor He's weak, Eric is, for all he's so clever and all that, and this woman simply got hold of him and made him do what she wanted. He nev wanted another wife, not he. He only wanted somebody to show in front of, somebody who didn't know him like I did; he never want to be landed into this; and I'm sure he's miserable even now and he be worse tomorrow. If he can tell me to my face, he doesn't want come back, that'll be different; I'll go away and never say another wor But he won't, you'll see."

"I'm sure you're right," said Miss Trant, remembering the unea little figure in the hotel.

"A wife knows, Miss Trant," Mrs. Tipstead observed earnestly. Th e looked up and, with a startling change of tone, cried: "Well, Miss, hope you're not going to charge us for butter when we've had nothing ut margarine." And after wrangling with the waitress, she then pro- eded to wrangle with Miss Trant, who wanted to pay the bill herself. rs. Tipstead did not want to pay it, she wanted to divide it scrupu- usly into two, and she had her way.

A few miles brought them to pleasant hilly suburbs and very soon ey were threading their way towards the vast haze that was Sheffield.

III

iss Trant sighed with relief. This was the street they were looking r, and though it was not far from the centre of the town, it had been ery difficult indeed to find, and she was weary of stopping to ask the ay, turning in crowded streets, dodging trams and lorries, all of which e had been doing for the last hour. It was a grimy and melancholy reet, one of those that have steadily fallen in the social scale these last rty years, that begin by housing prosperous merchants and bank man- gers and gradually decline to the humble level of theatrical lodgings, rset agencies, palmists' consulting-rooms, and other and more dubious nterprises. The other end of the street, not far away, was blocked by high wall. They had stopped the car a few yards round the corner, nd now looked down the street, wondering what to do.

"Look," cried Mrs. Tipstead, pointing. "Isn't that it? It's just like is."

The car stood outside a house about halfway down on the left; it was e only one in the street. Miss Trant was sure it was hers. What a ity she couldn't take it without a word! But some explanation was ecessary, of course. Perhaps she could get it back without being in- olved in the affairs of the Tipsteads.

"Hadn't I better go first?" she asked. "I shall have to see your hus- and, of course. What's the name of this woman?"

"If you mean her second name, I don't know. It was just Effie on the etter. So far as I can see and from what Willy said, everybody in the own just called her Effie. They would, wouldn't they?" Mrs. Tip- tead added vindictively.

"Well, I simply refuse to go up to that house and ask for Effie." She thought for a moment. “Perhaps you had better go first and enqui for your husband.”

“No, that wouldn’t do. I’ll tell you what. I’ll get out here and wa a bit. You drive right up to the house and ask for Eric—Mr. Tipste —you see, and I’ll—I’ll—come in later on.” She was very excited no

After some hesitation, Miss Trant agreed, though she did not und stand what Mrs. Tipstead intended to do and could not imagine h waiting outside in the street very long. She drove up to the house, d covered that the car really was her own, with all its luggage there ju as she had packed it in that morning, then knocked at the door, not ve loudly because she suddenly felt quite uncomfortable, almost guilty, if she were a spy. This feeling did not last long, however, and as nobo came she gave the door, which did not look as if it had had any atte tion from anybody for years, a good sound rapping. Then she notic there was one of those old-fashioned bells that have to be pulled o She gave it a little tug, but it did not move. She gave it a hard tug a immediately fell back with about a yard of wire in her hand. At th moment, of course, before she could release the wire, the door w opened.

“Good evening,” said the man who had opened the door. He had thick husky sort of voice.

“Good evening,” gasped Miss Trant, feeling very foolish. She let of the bell handle and it hung down absurdly, at the end of its yard wire.

“You’ve had a bit o’ bother with that, have you? Out of date, yo know, out of date. All electric now, isn’t it? You can’t stir for it,” h observed amiably. He was a stout elderly man with a prominent reddi nose, an expanse of grey-bristled jowl, and a pair of spectacles push up to his dampy forehead. One hand clasped a newspaper, and the othe now that the door was open, replaced in his mouth a short clay pip He wore neither coat nor collar, was lax in the matter of buttons, an altogether was a figure of unlovely ease.

“Is Mr. Tipstead here, please?”

He took out his pipe to think this over. “Tipstead? Tipstead? Not ing to do with the Bird-in-Hand Friendly Society, is it? ’Cos that two doors down. We’re always getting ’em here.”

"No, it hasn't. I was told Mr. Tipstead was staying here. He took y car by mistake, and I've got his."

The man's eyes grew rounder, then one of them gave her a wink. e leaned forward. "Our Effie's chap, you mean," he whispered. "I've ard about that car. Didn't know his name was Tipstead, though. ric' she calls him. 'Eric or Little by Little,' I said, right off. And he dn't like it, neither. Come in."

No sooner had Miss Trant followed him into the dilapidated little ll than the large blonde herself, Effie, bounced out of a back room, ying "Who is it, Unkerlarthur?"

'Half a minute, half a minute! You'll soon know." And Uncle thur ushered Miss Trant into this same back room, a rather small d dark apartment that contained a bewildering assortment of small les and knick-knacks and fretwork brackets and photographs. Among se, not unlike a knick-knack or piece of fretwork, was seated Mr. pstead, nervously pulling at a cigarette.

Miss Trant addressed herself to him at once. "You probably remem- r me. I was lunching at the next table to you this morning. You nt off in my car——"

She could say no more. Mr. Tipstead sprang forward excitedly, and and his Effie began explaining at the top of their voices. They con- ued for several minutes, first one of them taking the lead, then the ier, correcting one another as they went along. But it was Effie who ncluded the explanation. "And so we found your name and address one of the bags and were going to write this very minute, weren't , Eric, to tell you how it had happened, and Eric was going to offer drive it back for you, weren't you, Eric, to make it all right, and we'd nt a telegram to the hotel to ask about his car, you see, because that s left behind and somebody might have got it, hadn't we, Eric?"

Your car's outside."

Outside!"

Yes," Miss Trant went on, 'I came up here in it.'

Thank God!" cried Effie, blowing hard. She had dropped the man- r she had assumed at lunch, probably finding it too great a strain in h a crisis, and was clearly now her own natural self, dramatic, voluble, gar.

A weak smile lit up the face of Mr. Tipstead, who still had that vag hunted look. "Well, that's a bit of all right. And thank you very mu Miss—er—Trant. That's it, isn't it—Miss Trant? We got the na right, you see. And we can just change over now, can't we? Drive all right? Yours was O.K. It's the same bus, you know, but a newer than mine."

"Just fancy!" And Effie's eyes, which were her best feature and look quite bright under her thickly pencilled lashes, travelled from Mr. T stead to Miss Trant, from Miss Trant to Unkerlarthur, who was leani against the door, puffing at his little clay, and enjoying every mom of the scene. Gaiety itself, Effie invited them all to fancy with h "You've no idea what a load you've taken off our minds," she told M Trant. "It was just spoiling everything, wasn't it, Eric?" She smi hugely at that gentleman and threw an arm about his shoulders. It w a fine solid arm, coming out boldly, imperially, from the short slee of her lilac silk jumper, and it seemed to announce at that moment th it was ready to protect an Eric it contrived to diminish from all t trials and assaults of this world. Mr. Tipstead wriggled a little in embrace.

"Now then, Miss Trant," Effie continued, "do sit down and make yo self at home. And Unkerlarthur, if you're going to stop in this roo you'll have to go and put a collar and a coat on and make yours look respectable; we're not just by ourselves now. Aren't you playi at the theatre this week?"

"I am that." And Uncle Arthur blew out his cheeks, sent his har sawing backwards and forwards, and, in short, gave an excellent in tation of a trombone player. "Pom-pom-poppa-pom. Pom-pom-pop pom. It's a musical comedy—*The Girl in the Garage*—this week augmented orchestra—so I'm in. You'll soon be rid o' me. I'll have go and change soon." And he gave Miss Trant, who had turned to lo at him, a prodigious wink. We know, don't we?—the wink said to h

Miss Trant did not know, but she smiled at him. She liked Un Arthur, somehow, and the thought that he was one of those mysteri creatures who creep from under the stage and sit so coolly, blowing fiddling away, in their little deep trench, gave her a thrill. She h ways been fond of the theatre—the whole enchanted absurdity of it and had never been able to go often enough.

“I'm sure you must be tired, Miss Grant,” Effie continued. “Now do yourself down and make yourself at home.”

“I won't, if you don't mind. Now that we've settled which car is ich, I think I'd better go.” And it occurred to Miss Trant, when had said this, that she had not the faintest idea where she was going.

Effie looked really disappointed, almost aggrieved. “Oh, but after ning all that way and bringing Eric's car and us taking your car arly all the day and you coming right out of your way like this! We 't let you run away like that, can we, Eric? Hello! What's the matter th you, Eric? No, don't interrupt him. He's thought of something, ught of it deep down in his little head, all by himself, and he'll tell if we'll keep quiet a minute.”

This was badinage heavy enough to make an elephant wince, but it no effect upon Mr. Tipstead, who still stared at Miss Trant, with his und little mouth open. “I've just been trying to work it out,” he said last, giving his weak laugh. “This is what I can't understand. How you come to be here, Miss Trant? This address wasn't on any of bags, was it?”

I've no idea,” replied Miss Trant easily. “I never looked at the bags.”

Well, I never did! I never thought of that.” Effie looked from one the other. “You just came here and we'd got your car and you'd ours and I never thought any more about it. Well, how did you ow we were coming to this house? Hello! What's that?” There s a repeated knocking at the front door. “Unkerlarthur, go and see o that is.”

It's somebody come to put the rent and rates up, 'cos he's seen two s standing at the door,” remarked Uncle Arthur, with a waggish nce all round. They could hear him chuckling down the hall.

Well, you don't mind us asking, do you,” Effie pursued, “but really does seem funny, doesn't it, you coming here——”

Mr. Tipstead held up his hand. “Half a minute,” he said, listening. en he rose to his feet, a very shaky little man. There was a sound of ces in the hall.

What's the matter? Who is it?” cried Effie, now looking alarmed.

"It's her," said Eric in a very small voice. It really seemed as if his colour had ebbed away; he was obviously terrified.

Mrs. Tipstead marched into the room, a little figure but compa charged with energy, all bristling. She halted, gave a quick glance the astonished Effie, then surveyed the shrinking figure of her husbar "Well, Eric, I've followed you, you see."

Effie made a last desperate attempt to carry off the situation wit high hand. "Here," she cried, "who told you to come in here? W do you want?"

Mrs. Tipstead was fully equal to the situation. The question p sented her with a magnificent cue. "What do I want?" she cried. S pointed to the wretched Tipstead. "That's what I want. My husban

"O my God!" groaned Uncle Arthur at the door, and he promp shut it and left himself on the other side.

"Now then, Eric," his wife continued briskly, "I'm not going to arg with you here. You can take your choice here and now. Just ma up your mind whether you'll stay here with this woman or go ba to the shop with me. One or the other. And it's the last time, min

"Eric, no; you wouldn't, would you, Eric!" As she shrieked this o Effie looked as if she were about to fling herself bodily at poor lit Mr. Tipstead, who would certainly have gone down like a ninep He shrank back, moistened his lips with his tongue, and looked utte abject.

"Not after all you've said, Eric," moaned Effie, who was rapidly goi to pieces.

"You be quiet and leave him alone," commanded Mrs. Tipstead. "I him make his own mind up."

There was a silence.

"Well?" asked Mrs. Tipstead.

Eric looked up, looked down, cleared his throat, swung one fo cleared his throat again, swung the other foot, then made a sound t bore no resemblance to any known word.

There was another silence.

It was Miss Trant who broke it, shattered it completely, Miss Tra who had no business to be there at all. At the sight of Tipstead stan ing there, so dumb, so abject, a kind of angry shame had begun to ta ssession of her mind, had pricked and then at last gored her until she ıld bear it no longer.

'Oh, for goodness' sake, say something or do something!" she cried him, stamping her foot and beating her hands together. "Don't stand e that. Do have some courage, and either go or stay. Anything, anyng but this! It's—it's—absolutely vile." She was too excited to be prised at herself, though this was perhaps the most astonishing speech had ever made.

He said nothing but at last he did something. Slowly, with bent ıd, absurdly, pitiably like a small boy in deep disgrace, he walked to door, opened it, and went out. He was going back home. Without ing a word, his wife immediately followed after him. The two left ıind never moved. Effie stared at the open door, her lower lip hang- foolishly. A few moments later, Mrs. Tipstead marched in again. He'd left his hat in here," she announced. She picked it up from the board, flashed a smiling glance at Miss Trant as she passed, and went , this time closing the door behind her. There came the sound of a being started outside in the street.

efore Miss Trant could do anything at all, Effie suddenly became mingly active. She ran to the door and then came running back in, crying "Oh, he's gone, he's gone. I've lost him, I've lost him"— something that sounded like that. With a fine gesture of despair, flung one arm along the mantelpiece and knocked over a large pink . Perhaps the hideous cheerfulness of this object enraged her, for she picked it up and hurled it into the fender, instantly smashing pieces. Then she threw herself into the armchair and burst into orm of tears, sobbed and sobbed, her whole body shaking and her drumming on the floor.

was an alarming spectacle. Effie was no chit of a girl but a woman very generous scale. The room did not seem large enough for such ulsions. It was incredible that they could have been set in motion Mr. Tipstead. "In another minute," Miss Trant thought, "she'll be ysterics," and saw herself trying to hold Effie down as she had once to hold down a maid at home. She was annoyed with herself for having gone before this, but on the other hand she felt she could go now, not at this moment. "Don't, don't!" she cried, and moved a step or two forward, with the intention of doing something. But did not know what to do. The usual consolatory little actions see absurd, like trying to give a pat or two to an earthquake.

"Now what's up here?" Uncle Arthur was puffing and blowing bef them, looking from one to the other. "Has that chap gone?" he as Miss Trant. "I thought I heard him. Nay, lass, bear up, bear up." gave his niece an affectionate slap or two on the shoulder. "You're rid of him. He was nowt but twopennorth o' copper. Nay, lass, t it easy, take it easy."

Effie refused to take it easy. Violently she shook herself free fr his hand, drummed her feet on the floor again, and cried louder t ever.

"Well, you must have it out, I suppose," he observed philosophic Then he glanced at the hearth. "Gone and smashed an ornament all," he said to Miss Trant, lowering his voice and speaking confi tially. "Can't help it, you know. Temperament, that's what it We've all got it; runs in the family. If we're up, we're up, but if w down, we're down. It goes with talent, you know, and it's always the same i' this family. Her mother—she was my sister—could *The Volunteer Organist* and such like and make a whole club-roo cry—but if she were cross, she'd raise the roof, break anything. And grandfather—my father, you see—was the best euphonium-player Old Dyke Band ever had—I've known 'em come fifty miles to hear *Death o' Nelson*—but if he didn't want to play, he wouldn't play, couldn't make him. It wasn't beer, you know," he added earnestl if to arrest the thought that surely must be uppermost in his liste mind. "He liked a drop, but it wasn't that. It was temperament runs in the family. I'm a bit that way myself. But I'll have to be He was dressed for the theatre now, for he was wearing a very old coat and waistcoat, a queer turned-down collar and about an inc black tie. He caught Miss Trant's surprised glance, and winked at "Ar," he remarked complacently, "I know what you're thinking."

"Do you? Well, what am I thinking?" Miss Trant was amuse

"You're thinking 'He's gone and forgotten to change his trou that what's you're thinking."

Miss Trant laughed. "Well, as a matter of fact, I was." And ood reason, for he still wore the same trousers he was wearing before id they were blue.

Uncle Arthur winked again. "What the eye doesn't see, the heart on't miss," he observed. "I'm only on duty, you might say, from the aist up, and I could wear a kilt or clogs and it'ud make no difference u see. You notice next time you're at the theatre, and you'll see what mean."

Effie was being overlooked and so she stopped crying, to exclaim indig-ntly: "That's right, Unkerlarthur, go on, don't bother about me! nding there talking about trousers and kilts! And look at me!"

'Well, you feel a bit better now, Effie lass, don't you?"

'No, I don't." And to prove it she began again.

'Well, I must be off," he said hastily.

'And so must I," said Miss Trant.

'No, no, Miss Grant," cried Effie, "don't leave me to myself. I won't responsible if I'm left to myself, I won't really. Don't go."

Jncle Arthur stared at Miss Trant in pained surprise. "Nay, miss, e a heart. You're not busy, are you? Well, stop on a bit and keep company."

Nobody wants me, nobody," moaned Effie.

Course they do, Effie lass," said her uncle heartily. "Miss Dent here l stop and look after you a bit. I'm off then! Be good!" He gave s Trant a last wink as he went out.

ffie sniffed a little, then began to dry her eyes. "I'll bet I look a it, don't I?" And undoubtedly she did. "Do sit down and make rself comfortable. I don't want to keep you here if you've anything lo, of course, but I wish you'd stay a bit. There's nobody here, and m by myself tonight, I shall get the jimjams, what with all the excite-it there's been today and the state I've been in this last week and way he went off just now. If Unkerlarthur hadn't been working at theatre this week, he'd have stayed with me—he's a good sort is erlarthur—and this is really his house; well, really, me and my sister and him we all join of it, and we let rooms to theatricals, you w, as well, because my family has always been connected with the ession, and I went on the stage for a time and then had to leave, as too bad for my nerves, and Elsie—she's younger than me and very talented—she's still on, doing concert party work, you know." A this came out in one unbroken torrent while she was still dabbing h eyes and patting her hair. How she contrived to say so much and s it so quickly, having apparently been in hysterics two minutes befor was a mystery.

"Now, Miss Grant——" Effie began again.

"Trant," the lady put in, correcting her.

"Oh, you must excuse me. Of course it's Trant, isn't it. I had t name right at first, and then what with one thing and another—— D you catch my name? Longstaff, it is." She stood up and examined h self in the mirror. "First thing I must do is to tidy myself up a b I'll just slip upstairs, if you don't mind. Take your hat off, Miss Tra and rest yourself properly. What about a cup of tea and something eat?"

"It's awfully kind of you," said Miss Trant, who was really touch by this show of hospitality. She was not merely an intruding strang she was the villain of the piece, for had she not brought Mrs. Tipste to this very door? It was clear, however, that Effie was anxious to k her there, probably because she needed a listener more than usual t melancholy evening. "But I had tea, you know, some time ago," M Trant went on. "And I really don't think I want any more, tha you." She took a sensible interest in food, and had already begun wonder about dinner.

"Ah, that's afternoon tea, you mean," said Effie, "but we go in for hi tea in these parts, though as a matter of fact in this house supper's big do, and I'll tell you why. You see what with Unkerlarthur be at the theatre and then us letting rooms to the profession, none of th really wants anything solid till the shows are over, about half past to eleven, that's the time when they want a proper set-to, and so M Moore—that's the woman that looks after the house—goes away in afternoon and then doesn't come back till about nine or half past then cooks something hot for everybody, you see."

"That's a very queer way of living," said Miss Trant. "I don't un stand how anybody sleeps after that."

"They don't, you know, not early. But they can stay in bed in morning. And they couldn't have a solid meal just before the sh ke these we've let to this week—I've not seen them but Unkerlarthur d me they were here again, and they've been here before—the Four manies—acrobats, you know—you'll probably have seen 'em—they're good turn—well, if they'd their dinners at night and then went on to their show, they'd have to be taken to hospital in ten minutes. And n Unkerlarthur has to wait. I've heard him say many a time 'Give a good plateful of steak and kidney pudding and you just might as ll push a cake of soap up the old trombone.' Can't play, you see, after t."

I see. But you needn't wait, eh?"

Oh no, not at all. They weren't expecting me, anyhow, tonight. at's why I say let's have a bit of something now. I could nip out for ething in a minute. Just rough-and-ready, take-us-as-you-find-us, you w."

iss Trant was not anxious to take them as she found them. "Look ," she said, "won't you come out to some hotel and have dinner with And by the way, I can't possibly leave Sheffield tonight. I must an hotel to stay in tonight, and I must go and put my car away too."

With having these Romanies here—though one of 'em's only a dwarf u never saw such a little man—we're rather full up, though I dare I could squeeze you in here somewhere——"

on't trouble, thank you," said Miss Trant earnestly. The thought of g squeezed in there was too much even for her new adventurousness. bably you can take me to some hotel where I can stay and we can dinner too."

'd love that," cried Effie enthusiastically. "It's very nice of you, I'm , and if it's not saying too much, I don't mind telling you it's just t I need a night like this, I mean having a little friendly outing. o!" She broke off, and listened. "Front door again. Hope it's body for the Bird-in-Hand this time. I'm getting nervous." She led uneasily, departed, only to return the next moment with a tele- in her hand. "It's for Unkerlarthur. What's he doing with tele- s? Here, I'm going to open this. It's all in the family." She did it and, characteristically, read it out at once. "Here, listen to this. *bust all stranded send other basket passenger train also three* *pounds anything wheres Effie. Elsie.* Well, I don't know! What you think of that?" She stared at Miss Trant.

"I don't think anything of it," replied Miss Trant, "because I do understand it. What does she mean?"

"She doesn't know I'm here, you see," cried Effie excitedly. "And bet anything she rang up Lichfield to tell me, and they told her I'd go they didn't know where. Rawsley this is from. I knew they were Rawsley all last week. It's just like her, too, sending a long telegr like this—over a shilling, you see. It's a funny thing those girls h always got money for telegrams, doesn't matter how broke they They never write, nobody on the stage ever writes."

"Yes, but what does it mean?" Miss Trant was now so curious she was quite impatient. These little glimpses of that mysterious w behind the painted scenes excited her.

"Well, don't you see, the show's suddenly busted—she was with a cert party, pierrot troupe, you know—and they're all stranded. The business. No salaries for a few weeks, then one morning the man or the fellow that's running it isn't there, and they're all up a gum That's what happened to them at what's its name—Rawsley."

"Where's that?"

"It's somewhere in the Midlands, not above thirty or forty miles f Lichfield. That's all I know. I never heard of it before. It's on these small towns, you know, that some concert parties try out w they've finished a season at the seaside. And now she wants her basket sending on, by passenger train, you see, so she'll get it in time, and a pound or two to get her out of the place. Some mangy ma's probably claimed her basket till she gets paid for her rooms. get that basket—it's got all her other props in—off in the morning, if Unkerlarthur's got a spare quid or two—'cos I haven't—I'll post on too, first thing."

"You've got her address, of course?" Miss Trant did not enquire of mere politeness; she was really interested.

Effie looked blank. "Well, if that isn't just like her! She sends a splathering telegram and never puts her address in it."

"Can't you send it to the theatre?"

"They've not been showing at a theatre because there isn't o awsley. It's one of those holes where you do three nights at the Corn xchange or all next week at the Assembly Rooms. Don't I know 'em! owhere to dress and all draughts and the curtain never works. It'll ıve to go to the post office, that's all, and take its chance—I mean the oney. The basket'll have to go to the station. It's what I call a mess. ere, I'm going to tidy up, and then we'll go out and talk about this er. Won't you come up?"

"No, thanks. I might as well wait until I get to the hotel and then hall have my things."

'All right. I shan't be long. You have a look at our photos."

The walls were covered with photographs, and Miss Trant spent the xt quarter of an hour examining them. It was like catching a glimpse, a peepshow, of another world. There were photographs of large ies in tights, massive Dick Whittingtons and Prince Charmings, or all ladies in ballet skirts or pierrot costume. There were photographs gentlemen in evening dress, in battered hats and monstrous-check users, in nothing at all but leopard skins and laced boots. Niggers l fairies and tramps and pierrettes stared out with the same wide ersonal smile. Nearly every photograph had not only a dashing ıature, followed by a brief but imposing description of the writer—*ding Comedian in 'Hot Times', Principal Girl 'Mother Goose', Star- in 'The Doodahs',* and so forth—but also flung out, with a prodity of exclamation marks, some such message as *Heaps of Love!* or *the Best!!* It was impossible not to believe that the subjects of these tographs were not living in a whirl of success; they seemed to smile of a glittering triumph. Only by making an effort could Miss Trant se that these radiant creatures might be stranded in little towns and educed to spending their last shillings on S. O. S. telegrams. But was aided by the sight of a post-card, crammed with broad grins frills and pompoms, sent by Elsie herself, now so forlorn at Rawsley. 'as all curiously fascinating. Here was a world that seemed as far y and fantastic as any of those she explored so eagerly in her favourite on, that of the embattled Huguenots or the Young Pretender, and t was only just round the corner. Indeed, she had one foot in it at moment. That was an exciting thought, and though she laughed

at herself a little, nevertheless the foolish little thrill of it remained, li
a tune going on somewhere at the back of her mind.

Then Effie bounced in. Miss Trant had hoped that Effie would depr
her evening's toilet to the level of this disastrous day. She looked f
ward to seeing an Effie more cheerful in mind but far more subdued
appearance. Actually, however, Effie was now more flamboyant th
ever; her hair was a wilder gamboge; her eyebrows and lashes w
astonishingly blackened and her mouth was a fiercesome daub of v
milion; her dress was a vivid green; and she carried an imitation Sp
ish shawl that promised to be the final catastrophe.

"I don't know whether to wear it or not," she mused. "Pretty, isn't i

"I shouldn't wear it if I were you," Miss Trant counselled earne
She was relieved to find that her companion immediately and q
meekly put the shawl away. It was soon apparent, however, that E
had made her final onslaught upon the day's melancholy upstairs in
room; she had called up the last reserves from her wardrobe and dr
ing-table and had gained a brief victory; but that now she could do
more. Her appearance was hardily triumphant, but her manner bec
more and more subdued. When the car had been put away, the r
secured at the hotel, and they sat down to dinner, Effie chattered
longer. Over the soup she looked as wistful as it is possible for a pe
so large, so bright of hue, to look when eating soup. After that
became sentimental, confidential. She would not talk of Elsie or Un
larthur; her thoughts were with Mr. Tipstead.

"I didn't think anything of him at first, you know, Miss Trant,"
confided mournfully. "Thought he was a little swanker. He kept c
ing in and there was a bit of talk about him because he'd won a pri
one of these competitions. But that got nowhere with me, I can tell
and I'm used to admiration and men saying silly things, what with b
on the stage and then hotel work; they all run after you, you kno
pretend to, just to pass the time. But he kept coming in and comin
and we got to exchanging bits of jokes, you know; and he'd mak
laugh sometimes. You wouldn't think he was droll, would you?"

"I shouldn't," replied Miss Trant promptly and with decision.

"Well, he is. But that was nothing. I've met 'em far funnier
him—make a cat laugh, some of the fellows I've known would. T

day, I was walking round in the afternoon—off duty, you know, and
hing much to do—and he comes along, and we go for a bit of a walk
d sit down, and he asks me about my life, where I've been, and all
t, and then he tells me all about himself, how he's married and it's
been a mistake and how his wife doesn't understand him and won't
nk about anything but making money——"

I must say I think that's nonsense," Miss Trant put in. "I should
nk she understood him only too well. But men always say that, at
st they always do in books and plays."

Well, in real life, they'll say anything for twopence, that's my experi-
e. And we'll always believe 'em. At least," she added, with a sudden
am of sagacity, "we'll believe 'em if they tell us what we want to
eve. Anyhow, that started it. I felt sorry for him, and he said how
y he was for me—and you can do with a bit of sympathy when
've had nothing but a row of great fat fellows all talking silly round
bar every night. And then all of a sudden—quicker than catching
—he got a real fascination for me; couldn't keep my mind off him.
have gone anywhere, any time, to see him. But you know what it is."

'm not sure that I do," Miss Trant replied, with some hesitation.
re came, unbidden, to her mind the thought of a tall Scots ship's
or, a deep voice, a glint of hair about prominent cheekbones. Hugh
Farlane. How queer to think of him now! But then, hadn't she
denly thought about him the other day, when Mrs. Chillingford had
her that Dorothy was engaged? It was time she forgot about him.
knew less about him now than she did about—Mr. Tipstead. Yet,
ly, that was queer, too. She hardly noticed what Effie was saying.
nething about her being pretty. The word startled her into attention.

Pretty!" she cried. "Don't be absurd. I'm not pretty, and never was."

My words but you are!" exclaimed Effie in all seriousness. "And
't think I'm flattering you, either, 'cos I never flatter anybody—that's
my way. Course you're pretty. I only wish I was half so pretty.
've got lovely hair and eyes and teeth—they're your own, aren't
?—and nice features and a nice slim figure. Mind you, Miss Trant
you'll let me say so—I don't think you make the best of yourself.
r style's too quiet—of course, it's ladylike and all that, but you can
too much of the ladylike, if you see what I mean."

Miss Trant did not see what she meant, or did not choose to s
Effie told her and produced, among other things, what she called “so
tips and wrinkles you won’t find in any of the books of words,” a
this she did with great precision and fluency but still with a cert
melancholy, as if life were all over for her and she was only shouti
a few last messages to the fading shore. Most of this advice Miss Tr
instantly decided to ignore, not having any desire to look like a hum
oleograph, but now and again she heard something that left her m
determined than ever to take stock of herself. Indeed, she was all ea
attention, having been started into it by the initial compliment. Eli
beth Trant of the Old Hall, Hitherton-on-the-Wole, was sitting in
dining-room of an hotel in Sheffield with a barmaid, a large, loud, a
badly painted female who had failed that day to capture another woma
husband; and because she had just been told she was pretty, Colo
Trant’s daughter was pleased and excited at once, perhaps better plea
and more excited than she had been for years. Hitherton would ne
have believed it.

Was it this conversation, was it the sight of those photographs in
sitting-room, was it merely a sudden lack of interest in cathedrals,
Liverpool or elsewhere, or was it a combination of all these things t
made Miss Trant offer her services? She will be seen arriving at ot
decisions but at none really of greater importance than this, which is
such moment indeed that everything related up to now has been a m
overture to it. It came easily enough, and as usual with nothing
indicate that here was a little lever that might move whole wor
Effie had returned to the subject of Mr. Tipstead, whose sun was
setting with her; then she had passed rather mournfully to talk of her
and her own prospects, and hinted at trying the next day for a place
a certain gentlemanly bar in Sheffield, where apparently she might
able to piece together a broken heart; and finally and momentously
arrived again at her sister Elsie, waiting in Rawsley for her basket
some money. It was then that Miss Trant made her offer.

“If you like, I’ll take them down for you tomorrow,” she annou
quite calmly. “No, it won’t take me out of my way because real
haven’t got a way. I was going to Liverpool to see the cathedral but
much rather go to Rawsley and see your sister.”

Effie agreed with enthusiasm. It was arranged that Miss Trant should ll at the house next morning for the basket and whatever sum Unkerrthur might be able to raise at such short notice. There would be no fficulty, Effie pointed out, in finding Elsie in a town of that size, where erybody knew everybody else's business. She launched upon a descripon of Elsie that soon became a bewildering biography, and at last Miss rant had to cut her short, pleading that she was tired and would like go to bed early. That was quite enough. Instantly, Effie was for shing her upstairs at once and putting her to bed with her own hands, d by the time Miss Trant had excused herself from any such treatent, she was tired indeed.

The day had been so long, so eventful, so cluttered with other people's es, with Tipsteadery, that it seemed to press upon her now, a weight d huddle of experience not to be borne without some little respite of rkness and quiet. Thus it was a relief to see the last of Effie, now nost tearful again and threatening huge embraces, to meet the chill ptiness of the hotel bedroom, as impersonal as a packing case, to slip t of the day altogether, after having crowned it with a little gesture of e's own. In short, Miss Trant did not regret her change of programme, d slept well.

IV

us it was that she found herself, on the Thursday afternoon, on the d a few miles from Rawsley. Behind, on top of her own bags, was a atrical basket, the property of Miss Elsie Longstaff, and in her handg was a letter from Effie and an envelope in which she had seen kerlarthur place a dirty pound note and an equally dirty ten shilling e; all he could muster. She had hinted that she could lend Elsie some ney herself, but Unkerlarthur had insisted on sending this thirty shills. It had never occurred to Miss Trant that she, a stranger, was being sted with these things, and neither Unkerlarthur nor Effie had pointed this fact or shown the least hesitation; all of which says something the company we are keeping.

he rain that had driven Mr. Oakroyd under the trees had compelled ss Trant to put up the hood of her car. With the first appearance of sun, she had stopped to take down the hood, and this time had

stopped altogether. The car refused to start again. She cranked aw
until she was breathless and aching. She pressed the self-starter un
at last it would not even make a noise. When she was not attending
one or the other, she was hopefully flooding the carburettor. It was u
less; the engine would not start, never even gave a promising little cou
or splutter. She looked wistfully at its mysterious pipes and wires a
cylinders. "How absurd these things are!" she told herself. "It loo
just the same, exactly the same as it does when it's going, and yet
won't go." There was nothing for it but to wait until some one ca
along who knew more about the interior of a car than she did. As
roads now are crowded with people who know all about such thin
her position did not make her feel uneasy. The road to Rawsley, ho
ever, was singularly deserted that afternoon. Ten minutes passed a
brought not a soul. Then a little figure came into the struggling su
light. And this, of course, was Mr. Oakroyd walking into his adventu

When he came closer, Miss Trant noticed that he was carrying a b
of tools and, of all things, one of those absurd little basket trunks, a
the very smallest she had ever seen. When he came closer still,
noticed that this sturdy middle-aged workman had a broad pleasant f
and eyes of bright blue. His brown cap was on the back of his he
and looked too small for him, and this cap and the ridiculous li
basket trunk made Miss Trant want to laugh. What she did do, ho
ever, was simply to smile at him and to ask if he knew anything ab
cars.

He did not raise his cap, he did not touch it in salute, but he pus
it further back on his head. In this way he contrived to give the l
some sort of salute and also keep his independence at the same ti
"Well," he replied to her question about cars, "I do and I don't, as
might say." And he smiled back at her, his face wrinkling pleasa
in the sunshine.

"I wonder if the 'do' part of it would apply to this car, because I c
make it start, you see. I wonder if you'd mind having a look at it.
sure you could do something with it." Miss Trant had great confide
in all men who carried bags of tools about with them, and would h
been surprised to learn that joiners usually know very little ab
internal-combustion engines.

"What I mean is this," he went on, following his own thoughts stubornly. "I've nivver driven a car i' my life. Cars as cars has nowt to do i' my job. But where I've been working, they've a lot o' lorries and ve spent many an hour watching t'lads set 'em to rights, so I've picked p a bit about 'em. Nar do you understand me, Missis—I mean, Miss?"

His caution, his broad North-country speech, and certain whimsical etails of his appearance all delighted Miss Trant. "I see. But I'm sure ou could find out what's wrong with it."

"I might and I might not. You can nivver tell wi' these things. I'll ave a do at her, though. Nar what have you done so far?" And he stened to her tale of cranking and petrol flooding with the deep lemnity of a man about to take over a job. When she had finished, e remarked: "I'll bet it's either t'plugs or magneto. She won't start if er plugs is mucky. We'll have a look at 'em."

Cheerfully he set to work, first pulling out the car's tool box, then nscrewing one plug after another. "They're none so bad," he observed, ut we'll give 'em a bit of a rub up while we're on t'job."

It was while he was giving them his bit of rub up that the sky sudenly darkened. From the massed clouds in the West there came a gue roll or two of thunder, and the next minute there was something ore than a mere shower, there was a downright pelter. Mr. Oakroyd stily covered up the engine and then helped Miss Trant to raise the ood. "Come inside and shelter," she cried, climbing in. After a moent's hesitation, he followed her, and there they sat together, looking rough the wind-screen at the downpour, a very queer pair indeed.

"Eh, I've left that basket o' mine out," he exclaimed, and brought it . "I've all my clothes i' that, an' they wouldn't dry so quick once ey'd gotten sopped through."

This last remark was made, in his excitement, in a brogue so broad at Miss Trant could hardly understand it. "I'm sure you must come om Sheffield," she said, after a pause. "I was there last night." This e little man reminded her of Unkerlarthur.

"Nay, I don't," he replied, apparently in some surprise. "I belong ny a mile off Sheffield. I came from Bruddersford. Nar, I'll bet u've heard o' Bruddersford, haven't you, Miss?"

"Yes, that's where they make cloth, isn't it? But that's in Yorkshi too, surely?"

"Ay, I should think it wor. It's more i' Yorkshire ner Sheffield. Y couldn't have owt more Yorkshire nor Bruddersford. An' I've liv there all my life, except for a bit when I was down South, till this week

"And where are you going to now?"

"Eh, I don't know. I was just going to have look round this Rawsl place today, but I don't rightly know where I'm going."

"I'm rather like that, too, at the moment," Miss Trant remarke The parallel amused her.

"I nobbut set off o' Monday night," he continued, a trifle dreamil "And what is it now? It's nobbut Thursday, isn't it? Well, it seem like months sin' I was i' Bruddersford, I've done that much and se that much these three days. I'm fair capped wi' mesen. It's like bei one o' these chaps on t'pictures. And nobbut three days!"

Miss Trant could have clapped her hands, just as she used to do wh she was a little girl and as she had never thought of doing for year "But how queer!" she cried. "I've been just like that too. I've be away since Monday and all kinds of things have happened and I fe as if I'd been away months and was quite a different person. Don't y feel that too?"

"I do an' all." He was as delighted as she was.

"Do tell me all that's happened to you," she commanded. "But t me your name first."

"Oakroyd's my name. It's a right old Bruddersford name."

"And mine's Trant, and that's an old name too, in Gloucestershi And now you must tell me all your adventures since Monday nigh I'm sure you've had adventures, haven't you?"

"I have that. I've had so many, I don't fairly know where to sta It'll tak' a bit o' time."

"Never mind about that, Mr. Oakroyd. It's raining hard and we ca do anything until it stops, and I want to hear all about it."

After some hesitation, he told the whole story, with Lily and his wi and Leonard, the twenty pounds and the dismissal, the lorry the Gre North Road and Nobby and the Kirkworth Inn, the caravan and Jo Jackson and the fair and Jim Summers, in short, with everything in i iss Trant, who occasionally asked questions and insisted upon all the tails, enjoyed it all and decided that Mr. Oakroyd himself was adorle. In return, she told him enough to prove that she was really a llow adventurer. Then the sun came out again to brighten the last atter of rain.

"Nar we'll have a do at them plugs," said Mr. Oakroyd, who liked to ish on with a job once he had put his hand to it. His "do" was owned with success, for the car started easily. Miss Trant waved him ck to his seat, and they moved towards Rawsley. The town began, so many small towns do, with a railway station, and on the opposite de of the road, about a hundred yards further along, was a corrugated on hut labelled "Mounder's Station Refreshment Rooms." Miss Trant's e was caught by a pink bill pasted on the wall of this hut, near the orway. She pulled up, then got out to examine the bill. It told her hat she wanted to know: *The Dinky Doos,* in their Musical Medley of un and Frolic, were to be seen, it proclaimed, in the Assembly Rooms, awsley; and among the promised attractions were "the Dainty Numrs" of Miss Elsie Longstaff.

While she was reading this notice, a middle-aged woman appeared in e doorway. Perhaps she was Mounder herself, for she had the mournl resignation of one doomed to be encased in corrugated iron and to rve station refreshments.

Miss Trant turned to her. "Can you tell me if these people"—she inted to the notice—"are still in the town?"

Mrs. Mounder immediately folded herself up, her arms, her face, her hole body, being compressed at once, so that she seemed the very image bitter stoicism. "Yes indeed they are," she replied grimly. "They're here."

"What! Do you mean they're in there now?"

Mrs. Mounder shut her eyes, put her lips away altogether, and nodded r head so violently that the whole of her seemed to rock slightly. ame an hour ago, six of 'em," she said at last, "and ordered one pot tea and one plate of bread-and-butter, and they've asked for two lots hot water already, and some of 'em's eating what they brought themves. And sitting there jabbering away and ordering me about! ey'll get no more hot water I can tell you," she added, looking sternly at Miss Trant, as if to anticipate that lady's request that they should given still more hot water.

"Oh, what a shame!" cried Miss Trant, remembering their pligh

"You might well call it that, Miss. If everybody went on like th I couldn't keep a door open."

"No, I was thinking about them," said Miss Trant, boldly correcti her.

"Them indeed!" Mrs. Mounder sniffed. "Don't you worry about the They've impudence for anything, they have. We've heard about them

"Well, I'm coming to see one of them, and I'll have some tea to She turned away to invite Mr. Oakroyd, who was still sitting in the c to have some tea with her. At this moment, however, two men, lookin rather bedraggled, approached the hut, and in the narrow space betwe the road and the doorway there was hardly room for the three of ther The men stepped back to let her pass, but as they did so, the one front, a fair youth with a wild lock of hair and no hat, called out Mrs. Mounder: "Good afternoon, Madam. Have you Dinky Doos here

It sounded as if he were an officer of health enquiring about son infectious disease. Miss Trant smiled as she hurried past them. Sl heard the second man cry: "Lead on, Jollifant," noticed that he carrie a large flat case that looked as if it contained some musical instrumen and wondered if they were theatrical people too. They disappeared in the Station Refreshment Rooms. Then Mr. Oakroyd, a little diffiden followed them, and Miss Trant, who had returned to her car for h handbag, was last of all. In the doorway, she lingered a moment an heard an astonishing clatter of tongues coming from the inner roon "I'm quite excited," she told herself happily.

Chapter Six

INIGO MEETS A MEMBER OF THE PROFESSION AND TURNS PIANIST

I

We left Inigo Jollifant hurrying away from Washbury Manor in the darkness of Monday night. We have just seen him ive at the Station Refreshment Rooms in Rawsley on Thursday after-on. In order to understand how he came to be there at all, we must ow what happened to him during those three days, or, to be more cise, those sixty-four hours that began at 12.30 A.M. on Tuesday. Then it was that Inigo decided that Fauntley had been right. He ght to have gone to bed. The night was not warm enough and cer-ily not light enough to make walking very pleasant, especially after ong day of French and History and birthday celebrations. He ought have drunk more Rob Roy or less. As it was, Rob had played him e, for after conjuring him out of the school, out of his bed, he had stayed with him and kept him glowing inside but had gradually pped behind, and now, at the end of half an hour's walk, had slunk ay altogether. A little more Rob or a little less, and he would have n in bed now. So Inigo argued, and incidentally entertained him-, as he walked the last half mile or so of a familiar side-road that ed Washbury to the world. When he came at last to the main d, running north and south, he was back again in the world, but e was little of it to be seen as nothing was happening in it. He ned to the right, then spent the next minute wondering which of the t points of light was the North Star, and the next ten minutes won-ng about stars in general. It was, as usual, a cheerless meditation. ou are going to bother about these things, he decided, you have to n astronomer, to weigh them and measure them, out of sheer self-nce.

A rumble that he had heard behind him for some time turned at la into a lorry. This was the first vehicle he had seen on the road. H turned round and gave a shout when it came near. It pulled up, but tl driver seemed dubious when he was asked for a lift.

"It's all right," said Inigo, "I'm on a walking tour."

That was sufficient. The driver realised at once that a man on walking tour is an enemy to nobody but himself and may safely given a lift.

"But I can't take yer far," the driver shouted as they rumbled again. "About ten mile and no more. That's where I finish. I li there, yer see."

"Where?"

"Near Dullingham. And I'll tell yer what. Yer can get a train Dullingham Junction. Yer wouldn't think it but yer can. It's the or place for miles and miles where yer can get a train at this time o' nigh Dullingham Junction."

"Splendid!" cried Inigo at the top of his voice. The lorry appear to be full of suits of armour carelessly packed. "I like to hear that. Y wouldn't imagine anything ever happened at a place with a name li that, would you? Dullingham Junction! Where do they go to, th trains?"

"I dunno. Up Lincoln and Grimsby way or Doncaster way I d say, but I don't rightly know. I've never been on 'em but there's a fel I know, feller called Harry Briggs, works at the station and I know h on duty at night for this train. Always late too, he tells me. I'm sure he isn't on this week."

"I'd like to have a look at this station."

"That's right," roared the driver. "I'll put yer down close to And then he went on to shout of other matters, the chief of them be a very awkward journey he had just made to Northampton, and he often demanded agreement that Inigo, who felt that he ought to sympathetic, made himself hoarse before the ten miles were cover

At last the driver pulled up and pointed. "There y'are. See th lights. That's Dullingham Junction. Yer just go down that bit o' r and yer there. See if it's Harry Briggs."

The road curved down sharply to the station. As he descended, In ld see the signal lights, the faint gleam of the metals, and a dim low glow from somewhere in the station itself. His spirits drooped the sight. There was something very melancholy about Dullingham ction. The wide night itself was somehow not so cheerless as this f-hearted attempt to drive it away, this sad glimmer of light. It was quiet too. He could not imagine a train ever arriving there. The al cheerful railway bustle seemed as remote from this little station Paddington itself. He began to ask himself what he was going there whether it would not be better to return to the main road, and about nty yards or so from the entrance he stopped and leaned against the oden rail at the side of the road. Dullingham Junction only conned his opinion that he was indeed a young ass.

erhaps he would have turned away (and walked out of this chronicle gether) had he not heard a most astonishing sound. The sound itself pleasing and its unexpectedness, its daft incongruity, were ravishing. listened in delight, telling himself that he had judged Dullingham ction too hastily. It was saying that he was not a young ass, that is still a world in which midnight exits may be rewarded, that he not everything who has bed and breakfast. Somebody in Dulling- Junction was playing the banjo.

this was Harry Briggs, Inigo decided as he drew nearer, then Harry ggs was wasting his time in the service of the London and North tern Railway, for this banjo was not being fumbled with but was g *played*. The night retreated hastily before its impudent twanka-g, twanka-pang. Tired as he was, Inigo found that his feet itched reak into a double shuffle. If the station had been crammed with ning coons, buried under melons and cotton blossoms, he would not e been surprised.

e walked through the booking office, where only one tiny light was ning, and onto the dim and empty platform. The banjoist, now in a py fury of syncopation, was obviously in the waiting-room. Inigo ed in through the half-opened door. At one side of the little fire Harry Briggs or one of his colleagues, a young man with a round face, and at the other side, sprawling on the seat, was the banjoist self. One was so busy playing and the other staring and listening, with his mouth wide open, that Inigo stood there several minutes w out being observed.

With a final and triumphant wag of his head, the banjoist conclu his performance. "How about that, my boy?" he cried, holding up banjo as if inviting it to share in the applause. "You've heard th Now where are you going to hear the next like it? Can I rattle old banjo or can I not?"

"You can that, Mister," replied his audience earnestly. "My w you've got a touch, you 'ave!"

"You've said it. I have got a touch," the banjoist remarked w dignity. His utterance was rather thick and there were other indicati that he had been refreshing himself very generously earlier in the ni Apart from this thickness, however, his voice was peculiar. It wa curious, harsh drawl, and though he could not be said to have a defi American accent, nevertheless his accent was not quite an English It was so unusual that it excited Inigo's curiosity.

"You 'ave got a touch, and I don't care where the next one co from," his listener went on, enthusiastically if a trifle vaguely. "W about giving us just another, Mister? 'Ere, do you know *'Er 'Air Golden?"* And, fixing his gaze sternly on his companion, who loo rather startled, the railwayman sang very slowly and solemnly, with most lugubrious portamentos, the following ballad:

Errair was go-olden on the day
She gave 'er love too mee-yer,
And though it's long since turned too gray,
We're still in sympathee-yer.
And 'and in 'and——

But here he was interrupted.

"No, no," cried the banjoist. "No, don't know it. And between and me, stationmaster, it's not quite my style. A little too heavy on sentimental side, too much heart massage, for me, a matter of taste, know, a matter of taste."

"Ar, ar, I like a good ballad."

"You like 'em tender and trew, I can see that," said the banjoist, w a droll glance. "That's because you stay up so late by yourself, wait or the midnight express. Did you ever see *The Midnight Express*—the drama? I played in it once for three nights in Montreal!"

Inigo chose this moment for his entrance.

"Hallow, hallow!" cried the performer. "What's this?"

The railwayman jumped to his feet, looking startled, and was then annoyed because he had felt frightened for a moment or so. "'Ere, what's the idea?" he demanded angrily. "Coming creeping in like that!" Then, having taken a good look at Inigo, he moderated his tone. "Beg our pardon, but you made me jump. What is it you want?"

"I want a train," replied Inigo, though up to that moment he had not eally thought about trains.

"Oh, you want the 1.20, eh? Where do you want to go to?"

"Where do I want to go to? Now that's rather a puzzler. Let me ee," Inigo meditated. "Well, what about Stockport?"

"Stockport! You can't get to Stockport on this line."

The banjoist now took charge of them. "Stockport," he repeated, ather condescendingly. "Ever been to Stockport?"

"Never set eyes on it," Inigo told him.

"Then my advice is—don't bother. There's nothing there, not at all. know it well, my boy. I've been there; I've been everywhere. If you o go, you ask 'em. Ask 'em at the *Red Lion* if they don't know me. hey'll remember me all right. Morton Mitcham, that's my name. hey'll remember Morton Mitcham." And he stood up, perhaps to how exactly what it was they would not be able to forget. He was ertainly not a person who would be easily forgotten. He was tall but ery thin, and his clothes, a light check, merely hung upon him. There as a Shakespearian cast about the upper part of his head, for he was ald on the crown but had very thick dark hair at each side, bushed bout his ears. His eyebrows were immense and dramatic; his nose oasted a fine curve and a rather richer colouring than the rest of his ce; his long upper lip and his long pointed chin were blue; his slightly ollow cheeks were blue below and brown above; and indeed his whole ce had that curious parchmenty look that comes from exposure, at some me or other, to hotter suns than this country ever sees. His collar and reminded Inigo vaguely of Tenniel's Mad Hatter. Altogether, Mr.

Morton Mitcham was an unusual person; his appearance was as puzzli as his accent, oddly combining the tropical planter, the tragic actor the old school, and a rather down-at-heels senator from one of the r moter states of those that are united.

"I was listening to you playing the banjo," Inigo told him. "And b jingo, it was good too. It's a rattling good instrument played like that

"It is. But it's a difficult instrument, let me tell you. Yes, sir. I good, as you say, when it's played like that, but how often is it play like that?"

"Ar," said the railwayman fervently. "That's right."

Mr. Mitcham fumbled in a waistcoat pocket and finally brought o about an inch and a half of dusty cheroot. "Indian cheroot," he e plained. "There's nothing to beat 'em once you acquire the taste. had twenty boxes of the very best given to me once when I was up Bangalore. I never knew who sent 'em, didn't know a thing. 'T Morton Mitcham Esquire from an admirer'—that's all it said, on plain card. Woman's handwriting, though. I've one or two of the box still, in there." He pointed to a very large and disreputable bag on th seat. "I've carried 'em round ever since. But no cheroots in 'em. H ha!" Nor did it seem likely that he had any stock of cheroots with hin for the one he was lighting now had evidently been smoked befor He began putting away his banjo in its case. "You a musician?" h enquired of Inigo.

"I play the piano from time to time."

"A professional?" And he raised his immense eyebrows.

"No, a very ordinary amateur."

"Ah, pity!" Mr. Mitcham lowered his eyebrows, but did not cond scend to explain why it was a pity.

Inigo suddenly remembered the chocolate and biscuits that Daisy Ca lander had given him, and now he brought them out, inviting the other to eat with him.

"You're a traveller, a campaigner, a trouper, my boy, I can see that, cried Mr. Mitcham approvingly, helping himself and carefully extin guishing the cheroot. "Give me a few biscuits and some chocolate an a few bottles of whisky, rye for choice, and I'll face anything. Blizzar ıipwreck, anything. I once lived for a fortnight on nothing else, up ı the Black Hills between Wyoming and South Dakota——"

"South Dakota!" Inigo's cry was ecstatic. The man must really have :en there because you couldn't *think* of South Dakota, couldn't just lift out of some mental map.

"Yes, South Dakota. There were two of us. Let me see, what was at fellow's name? Ah, yes—Sheerman. He was an ex-Wesleyan minter who'd been running a quick-lunch bar down in Denver. Hardest inter they'd known for forty years, and the two of us walked right to it."

"Have another biscuit," said Inigo enthusiastically.

"Thanks, my boy, I will. Of course we'd whisky there too, any nount of it. Perhaps you're thinking whisky wouldn't shake down ith biscuits and chocolate, but let me tell you, they're fine together. If u've got a flask with you, just try it."

"Sorry, but I haven't."

"Always carry a flask," said Mr. Mitcham severely. Then he turned to e railwayman, who was demolishing a gigantic sandwich. "What out that tea you were talking about, stationmaster?"

The other mumbled something in his sandwich. Evidently he was ıbious now that there were three of them.

"You're not Harry Briggs by any chance, are you?" Inigo asked him. He was Harry Briggs; admitted the fact with delight, and insisted on Inigo explaining exactly how he came to hear of him. When the entity of the lorry driver had been fully established, Harry Briggs at ce changed his attitude towards Inigo, who felt he was now regarded nost as an old Dullinghamian. His round red face beaming at the ought of what coincidence could do, Harry Briggs set to work now make some tea.

Mr. Mitcham fastened the straps of his banjo-case. "Just a little hobby mine, you know," he remarked airily, tapping the case. "But it's ost useful; made the evening go all over the place. 'Ask Morton itcham to come in and play his banjo,' they'd say. Guest nights at sidencies, you know, and that sort of thing. I've played to at least lf a dozen colonial governors in my time, and they simply ate it nply ate it—all except one and that was old Lord Stennenfield."

"What was the matter with him?" asked Inigo. "No soul?"

"Deaf as a post, couldn't hear his own brass cannon going off. An the best bridge-player east of Alexandria, they used to tell me. That what he wanted, you see. 'Get the card tables out,' he shouts, right i the middle of my performance. I walked straight out. You can't d that to Morton Mitcham."

"Quite right," murmured Inigo. "You're an artist, sir, I can see that And he saluted him with a stick of chocolate.

"Well, I've been told so. I've been asked to give lessons by a coloni governor. I'll give you his name—though this is in confidence, gentl men." And he looked sternly at Harry Briggs, who was standing ope mouthed, with a kettle in his hand. "It was Sir Elkin Pondberr 'Damn it all, Mitcham,' he said to me, 'you'll have to teach me how t play that thing.' 'Very proud, Sir Elkin,' I told him, 'but it can't b done.' 'Damn it all,' he said, 'it must be done.' 'It would take years I told him. 'Then you'll have to stay here years,' he said. 'I'll have yo kept here, Mitcham, damned if I won't.' 'Can't be done,' I told hi 'I'm catching the next boat up to Bangkok.' And he had to give i But I told him about Stennenfield—they were meeting at Singapo very soon—and showed him how to deal himself four aces and fo kings. 'Damn me if you're not a genius, Mitcham,' he said when he' got the hang of it. 'I'll try that on old Stennenfield.' And he did, an it was the great joke that year in all the clubs out there. I heard abo it up at Hongkong."

"Hongkong!" cried Inigo, who was feeling rather dazed. "You'v held the gorgeous East in fee, absolutely. But what about those aces an kings? You're not a conjuror, are you?"

"Not exactly a conjuror. I've never bothered about illusions and th mechanical trick acts, you know. But sleight of hand's a hobby of min I think I can do most things with a pack of cards."

"You've got a heap o' talent, if you ask me, mister," said Harry Brigg who had now made the tea. "I wish I'd only got a bit of it. Yo wouldn't catch me 'ere. You've got a touch on that there banjoey, m word! 'Ere, 'ave a drop o' tea. One'll 'ave to 'ave the cup and othe the saucer."

"It passes the time, it passes the time," said Mr. Mitcham, and with an pparent absence of mind, he took possession of the cup, "I've found ese little accomplishments useful now and again on my travels, and olished 'em up a bit as I went along. I learned a trick or two in the eight-of-hand business from an old Chink I met one time in Shanghai, d then another time one of the Frenchified niggers you get in New rleans showed me one or two things I didn't know about playing the njo when I was down there. Though one of the best players I ever ard—in a class right above all these New York jazz-band men, and, ind you, I've heard them all—was an old Irishman I struck down in dney."

"There's a cousin o' mine there," Harry Briggs put in eagerly, "same me as me, except he's Jim, and he drives a van for a laundry. You ight 'ave come across 'im."

"What, Jim Briggs of the laundry!" cried Mr. Mitcham, with a wink Inigo. "I knew him well. He told me he'd a cousin down here. ook him up,' he said, 'if you're ever at Dullingham Junction.'"

"That was clever of 'im, seeing that I've only worked 'ere six months d it's two or three years since we 'eard from 'im. You can't pull my g, mister."

"Well, it's fifteen years or more since I was there," remarked Mr. itcham imperturbably. "I've been all over since then. I'm a wanderer er the face of the earth, I am, my boys. I've only been back in the ld Country two years, just looking round, you know, visiting a few old iends."

"Ar, a gentleman o' leisure like, now," Mr. Briggs observed with spectful envy.

"You've hit it," said Ulysses, in his queer harsh droll, now American, w English. Once more he brought out the stub of cheroot, this time very small and dusty stub, lit it, and blew out clouds of smoke in a anner that contrived to suggest leisure, a rich indolence, a return at st from innumerable and astonishing journeys round and round the obe.

"Heureux qui, comme Ulysse a fait un beau voyage," said Inigo, who as wondering how this incredible personage had ever been able to land

himself at Dullingham Junction in the middle of the night. It was rea surprising that he had been able to find this small island of ours at a

“That’s right, my boy,” he replied condescendingly. Then he yawne “What about that train of yours?”

“Should be ’ere this next half-hour,” said Harry Briggs, slowly tur ing himself into a railway official again. “She’s an hour late tonig I’ll just ’ave a walk round.” And he lumbered out.

“I don’t know whether I shall bother catching it,” said Mr. Mitcha settling himself down on the seat. “I’m going on to Nottingham, ju to see a few old friends, you know. But I might as well wait until t morning now. I missed a connection down the line.”

“Did you?” yawned Inigo. “Where was the place?”

“Um—I don’t remember.” For once, it seemed, that unusual memo of his had failed him.

Inigo had a suspicion that Mr. Morton Mitcham had not missed a connection. Mr. Morton Mitcham was a very unusual person, either great traveller or a great liar. Inigo decided that he wanted to see mo of him.

What he did see, however, was Mr. Tarvin. He and Mr. Tarvin we struggling through deep snow up a hill, and when they were halfw up, Mr. Tarvin stopped and looked round, saying “All this is Sou Dakota then. Chumha. Just call the boys, Jollifant,” and he called t boys, though there were none to be seen. But the next moment th were there, a whole crowd of them, making the most extraordina humming noise. It made Inigo so angry that he shouted at them, b they made more noise than ever. Then he stared so fiercely at t nearest boy, young Withington, that he stared himself out of Sou Dakota altogether, back again into the waiting-room, where Mr. Mort Mitcham was sleeping with his mouth wide open and snoring pro giously.

Inigo stretched himself out at full length on the seat and used h knapsack as a pillow. He listened to the snores for a minute or tw then slipped away again, not into South Dakota this time, but in oblivion. There he stayed, though once or twice it seemed as if t darkness and quiet were being mysteriously invaded, as if there we alarms and skirmishes on some distant frontier.

II

omebody was shaking him. He opened his eyes, to see a black mousche, large and badly trimmed, and it annoyed him so much that he osed his eyes again. "Now then, sir, now then!" it said.

Inigo did not feel called upon to reply.

"Time you was moving if you want the 6.45," it went on.

This remark was so extraordinary that it opened his eyes again. The aiting-room looked quite different in the morning light. He stared at e porter. "Where's Morton Mitcham?" he asked.

The porter shook his head. "'Tain't on this line. I never 'eard of it."

"It's not a station but a man. He was sitting there last night, talking out banjos in Bangkok and conjuring in Singapore. Unless I dreamt m."

"I shouldn't be surprised. I'm that way myself," said the porter earstly. "Let me 'ave a few or a bit o' tinned salmon last thing, and I'm f, all night. The stuff I've seen! Banjos and Singapore's nothing it."

"I don't know that I care for Old Rob Roy," Inigo mused. "He's lit my head open and left a sort of dark brown taste in my mouth, as I'd been chewing some of his Highland peat. But look here, where's hat's-his-name—wait a minute—Harry Briggs?"

"Ar, now you're talking! You didn't dream *'im,* I can tell you. Went f duty a bit back, he did. You missed the 1.20, didn't you? Going orth, aren't you, sir?"

"Am I?" Inigo thought it over. "I suppose so, but before I go anyhere I want a bath and a shave and some health salts in a tumbler of oid water and then some tea and toast. And perhaps an egg—you ver know—one of those young and tender eggs, the little brown ones. ow," and he produced a shilling, "what do you think about that ogramme?"

"Thank you, sir. Well, what I think is you'd best get on to Grantham this next train. Dullingham's no good to you, I give you *my* word. et anything you like at Grantham, anything you like." And the porter acked his lips at the thought of this roaring metropolis.

So Inigo went to Grantham. He sneaked through the early morning

sunshine to the *Angel and Royal,* where he slipped into a bathro
before most of its guests had looked at their early cups of tea, and h
to keep several of them at bay because he stayed so long luxuriating
nakedness and warm water. By the time he was fit to appear at t
breakfast table, he was ready for anything it had to offer. After bre
fast he smoked his pipe and stared, in a rather dreamy fashion, at seve
newspapers, and it was halfpast ten when he finally took the road.

It was only because he was the prospective author of *The Last Kn*
sack, that prose elegy of pedestrianism, that Inigo chose to walk out
the town, which offered him innumerable trains and buses. Walki
did not seem very pleasant that morning; the day was warm alread
the westward road was dusty and never free from motor traffic; a
he did not feel inclined to exert himself. It was better when at last
was able to turn down a side-road, which brought him, after many
corner that seemed alarmingly like a blank end, to a small red-brick i
and bread and cheese and beer. There was nobody to talk to at t
inn, for the landlord evidently had other work to do during the d
his wife had so little time to spare that she appeared even to serve t
beer under protest, and there was no company; but Inigo lingered the
until two o'clock, in a dreamy reverie. When he sauntered on agai
skirting fields of stubble and bright but decaying woods, the beer with
and the sun without conspired to make that reverie dreamier still.

He did not know where he was or where he was going, and he d
not care. He drifted like a leaf down the vacant lane. The wh
burnished afternoon was only an idle fantasy. "I move among shado
a shadow," he told himself over and over again, for his mind was a shi
ing jumble of quotations from the more melancholy anthologies. He
everything was golden, and nothing real perhaps except the du
"Golden lads and girls . . . come to dust." That was how it went, a
that too he repeated with swelling vowels that sent little shivers of ple
sure down his spine. He came at last to a place of exquisite shade a
peace, where the lane turned into a narrow road and great branch
hung over a grassy space at the corner. It was a place where a ma
could meditate or perhaps sleep for an hour. But some one had left
little car there. There was plenty of shaded space on either side of t
car, but the sight of it, suggesting noise and fuss, kept Inigo standin

ere he was. The car spoilt the place. He looked at it in disgust. en he looked at it in astonishment. He went nearer.

es, there it was. Along the bottom of the wind-screen was a notice ated in bold crimson letters: *Take heed for the end draweth nigh.* the rear compartment were a number of placards, two or three feet are and printed in even bolder crimson letters. Inigo did not scruple or clearly this was no time for scruples—to take out two of them. *d the stars of heaven fell upon the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her imely figs, when she is shaken by a mighty wind. And the heaven arteth as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and nd were moved out of their places.* Then he turned to the other, ch said: *And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabiters he earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three els, which are yet to sound!* He carefully replaced the placards and ched himself on the grass by the side of this strange apocalyptic e car.

was very quiet. The few sounds there were, a distant creaking, a ue twittering, were so remote that they might be coming from an-er world, another life. He stared out of the shade about him into shimmer of green and gold beyond. The whole afternoon had been bstantial. Now it all seemed little more than so much painted silk, ering at a breath. It's fragility hurt him; he closed his eyes. But ground he was resting on was solid enough, and the blades he pulled e the old sweet blades of grass. He opened his eyes again. The car f, though a little battered, had very definite substance. He noticed it had been fitted quite recently with a new set of tyres. Inigo led idly with the thought of these tyres. Perhaps the prophet who ed the car bought them because he expected to be still running about is car when the cities were sheets of flame and the mountains were ng like smoke. He might run right through Armageddon in it. t would be a record indeed; a non-stop run into the new heaven and n. And all the journalists and advertising men, poor ghosts, biting spectral lips because the very last edition had been printed, sold, ered away, long before! These fancies made Inigo feel more com-able, though there was still a little hollow place, as hollow as the world without, inside him. He yawned, shut his eyes, wondered w owned the car, then fell asleep.

He awoke about an hour later, sat up, and discovered that the ow of the car was there, fussing with it. For a minute or two, Inigo co only blink at him, but he decided that the man looked disappointin unprophetical. Their eyes met.

"Hello!" cried the man. "Do you think I disturbed you? I m have done, mustn't I? But you weren't here, were you, when I f came? It's very warm this afternoon, isn't it?" He spoke in rat high chanting tones, and as he spoke his whole face beamed. He a man about forty, and he had curly auburn hair damply clustered ab a somewhat lumpy forehead, gold spectacles, prominent cheek-bones small curling moustache, and too many teeth. He was very ne dressed in a dark blue suit and a black tie, and there was someth vaguely evangelical about his appearance.

"I don't think you disturbed me," Inigo replied, "and it doesn't ma if you did. It's stupid to fall asleep like this, gives you a headache— I was awfully tired." And he yawned.

The other flashed his spectacles at the knapsack. "You've been w ing, haven't you? I should think you're taking a holiday, aren't y What splendid weather we're having, aren't we? Perhaps you're g about alone, are you?"

"I wander lonely as a cloud, absolutely." Inigo struggled to his f

"Ah, I recognise that, you know," cried the other enthusiastic "That's Wordsworth, isn't it? About the daffodils, isn't it? A beaut piece too, don't you think? Now you're probably not feeling like w ing, are you? I wonder if I could give you a lift. I'm going on Oxwell. Do you know it? Are you going that way at all?"

"To tell you the truth," said Inigo, "I don't know where I'm go I'm just wandering about for a day or two, on a kind of holiday."

"That's splendid, isn't it? Though, mind you, I don't envy you cause the work I am doing—and it takes me all over the countr is better than any holiday, much better. Do you know what I'm doi Of course you don't. I'm organising secretary to the Second Re rectionists. Perhaps you're a Second Resurrectionist, are you?"

No. I'm not even a First Resurrectionist. I'm afraid I never heard them before.”

Is that so?” The man's face clouded for a moment, then brightened in. “But there, you have now, haven't you? I thought you might one because we're holding one of our special gatherings tonight at well, and I thought you might be on your way there. I'm going re myself, but I told you that, didn't I? Yes, the special meeting all the East Midland district—including both Ephraim and Gad ——”

Ephraim and Gad!” cried Inigo. “What have they got to do with it?”

Ah, that puzzles you, does it? You recognise them of course? Well, nust explain, mustn't I? One moment, though. I must tell you name.” He looked quite grave when he said this: “I'm E. G. Tim- y.” Then he smiled again.

And my name's Jollifant, Inigo Jollifant—rather absurd, isn't it?”

. G. Timpany held up his hand. “No, no, no. Not at all. You stn't say that. I know the name. Yes, I do. A Mrs. Jollifant is of our prominent workers in the South-Western district—that's eon, you know. Exeter is the headquarters of Simeon, and Mrs. ifant is, I believe, an Exeter lady. Yes, she keeps a teashop there. elation perhaps?”

don't think so,” replied Inigo. “But tell me about Gad and Ephraim, why Exeter is in Simeon.”

We divide up our country as Jehovah divided up Canaan among twelve tribes. I was the humble instrument of the command. At Annual Convention, some one complained about the confusion be- en the various districts. Our President turned to me. ‘Perhaps E. G. Timpany can suggest something,’ he said. At that very mo- t, I heard a Voice. And the Voice said ‘Look in your Bible.’ In sh, I saw what we were to do. ‘Are we not the Children of Israel?’ d, for we believe that the great Anglo-Saxon race is descended from ten lost tribes, just as the British Israelites do, only we have looked her into things than they have. ‘We will divide up our territory Canaan itself was divided,’ I said.” He stopped and took out his h. “Time is getting on, isn't it?”

suppose it is,” said Inigo, disappointed. He did not want to lose E. G. Timpany.

"Now I want you to do me a favour, Mr. Jollifant. I'm sure yo an educated man, aren't you? Have you any profession?"

"I'm a schoolmaster of sorts."

"A university man perhaps?"

"Cambridge. A Third in French, and a History Special."

"A Special, eh? That's splendid, isn't it?" cried Mr. Timpany, wh notion of a Special was evidently quite different from that of the u versity authorities. "I knew, though, I knew. I could tell in a mom You always can, can't you? Not that I'm a university man mys I'm not. I'm self-educated. I left school when I was fifteen—a school in Wolverhampton, it was—and all I've had since has bee Correspondence Course—on Accountancy, and very poor, I thought, at all thorough—and some evening classes in Commercial Span That was before I discovered the great teacher, Mr. Jollifant—the Bi the common, everyday, beautiful old Bible." And he suddenly produ one from nowhere, like a conjurer. "I'm sure you're not one of th so-called higher critics, are you?"

Inigo truthfully replied that he wasn't, but tried to convey the pression that he might have been a higher critic if he had cared ab that sort of reputation.

"But there I go, talking and talking away," said Mr. Timpa "What I wanted to ask you, as a favour to *me* was to come with me Oxwell. You'll be very welcome, Mr. Jollifant. There's a high at half past six—people coming from all parts, you see—and the gathering afterwards. I want you to come simply as my guest, friend, if you don't mind my calling you that, and I'm sure you d do you? Now what do you say? I'd like nothing better than to here and talk to you about some of our Second Resurrection tru but—as you can see, can't you?—I haven't the time." And he sm his wide innocent smile, with its flashing confusion of ivories, and pa a hand over his damp forehead and auburn curls.

There was no resisting this invitation. Inigo packed himself his raincoat and knapsack (both of which found a place among texts from *Revelations* at the back) in the little car, and off they w They slowly chut-chutted down the winding lanes, crawled thro f a dozen villages, for Mr. E. G. Timpany was an excessively cau- s driver, so that there was plenty of time for people to read the ce on the wind-screen: *Take heed for the end draweth nigh.* If such ple grinned, as they frequently did, Inigo gave them a solemn and hetic stare, but if they looked puzzled or startled—and one little and a man in a milk-cart really did look startled—he beamed upon with the air of a man bringing glad tidings. His companion not talk much because there were so many corners and crossroads the like to be carefully negotiated, but from time to time he let ome information about either the Second Resurrection movement or elf. So far as Inigo could gather, then and later, the Second rrectionists took their stand on some fantastic interpretation of the tieth chapter of *Revelations,* believing that Satan was let loose, given st unlimited powers, about 1914, when he instantly set to work de- g the nations and gathering them together for battle, that worse soon to follow, more and bigger battles, floods and earthquakes, ut of heaven, all within the space of the next two or three years, which the sea would give up its dead, the sun, the moon, stars, he round earth would vanish like clouds, and there would be an f all material things. In addition to this apocalyptic dream, there astonishing theories about the ten lost tribes and the Great Pyr- It was all very confusing, not unlike hearing somebody de- a nightmare. Mr. Timpany's own history, or such scraps of it as caught, seemed simplicity itself. The central fact in it was that sold what he called "one of the best insurance books in Wolver- on" to devote the remainder of his life, three years at the most, Second Resurrectionists. When Inigo applauded such courage ith, Mr. Timpany was very modest indeed, and pointed out ce he had come to believe in the Second Resurrection view of re, it was impossible for him to remain in the insurance business. nted to talk to people about our S. R. truths," said Mr. Timpany, felt it wrong to take their money, just as you would, wouldn't What was the use of my trying to persuade a man to take out y-years endowment policy, a thousand pounds, we will say, with at a premium of fifty-one pound ten, when I knew so well in heart that everything was coming to an end long before then?

The very last day, I remember, a man came to me because he want
to take out an education policy for his two boys, and I had to tell h
outright that his boys never would be educated, not as *we* know e
cation, you see. It was the least I could do, wasn't it? It woul
have been honest to have gone on, would it? Not that I wanted
but in any case it wouldn't, would it?"

Inigo thought this over. "I think it would," he announced at len
as gravely as he could. "After all, I suppose people only insure th
selves to set their minds at rest, because they feel assured about
future. Well, they'd have had that, you see. And their future *is* set
anyhow, you believe. They'd really have had their money's worth,
see."

Mr. Timpany did not see, and they were at Oxwell before the ques
was settled. Oxwell proved to be a miserable little town, and Mr.
pany explained that it had only been chosen as the scene of the gathe
because one of the chief Second Resurrectionists in the district happ
to live there and it was he who was providing them with the hal
the meeting and the tea. "Mr. Grudy is one of our old stalwar
strong character and very deep-thinking man," Mr. Timpany wen
to explain, "entirely self-made and quite well-to-do. He's a farmer
corn-chandler and horse-dealer and several other things besides.
a patriarchal character, and one of our most substantial S. R.'s. I'd
taking a message to one of his married sons when I met you," he a
as if that somehow clinched the matter.

There were several cars, a trap or two, and a little bus sta
outside the hall, a red-brick building of small size and less dignit
evidently served the town as a recreation-room. People, mostly w
were already buzzing in and out of the place, and Mr. Timpany,
a hasty excuse to Inigo, immediately dived among them and
disappeared for some time, leaving Inigo outside, staring at the
and at the large notices that surrounded the door. These wer
more fiercely apocalyptic than those in Mr. Timpany's car. In cr
lettering, bright as arterial blood, they announced a speedy end
familiar things. *And in those days,* they screamed, *shall me*
death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death sh
from them. The Second Resurrectionists, all washed and brushed

ect in their best clothes, passed in and out and shook hands, asked e another how they were and said they were quite strangers. Inigo ved nearer the door and was pleasantly assailed by the smell of freshly ked ham. He remembered that he had had nothing since breakfast a little bread and cheese. Yes, he was hungry. Then his eye was ght by the furious crimson of another placard: *Therefore I will ke the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the th of the Lord of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger.* He was feeling very dirty and untidy.

This is Mr. Jollifant.” Mr. Timpany was beaming upon him once e. “Mr. Grudy.”

Ve are very pleased to see you here today,” said Mr. Grudy in a very voice. There was certainly something patriarchal about him. He a gaunt elderly man carefully dressed in black. His eyebrows were y, intimidating; his nose had a masterful Semitic curve; his long e moustache was not altogether of this world. It was a face you l see framed in the smoke of a desert sacrifice.

igo said he was very pleased too, and then took Mr. Timpany on side and asked him about washing and brushing. Mr. Timpany mbered that Inigo would have to spend the night somewhere. He ilted Mr. Grudy, who advanced upon Inigo again. “There is in my house for you tonight,” he said. “You will stay with us.”

go, wishing he could reply in the same grand manner, could only ner something about thanking him awfully, better not, lot of le, very decent, easily manage somewhere though, to all of which Grudy paid no attention.

iere is a place for you,” he announced. “My wife is superinig the preparations for tea, but my niece shall take you to the ” And he stalked away, followed by Mr. Timpany.

o waited for the tall bony female with the large nose, the daughter hraim or Gad. To his astonishment, however, Mr. Timpany ed with a girl about twenty, all rosy and smiling, quite a pretty And this was Mr. Grudy's niece, Miss Larch, the maiden of the vho would wait upon him. Inigo, an almost painfully susceptible shook her hand enthusiastically and accompanied her to the which was only about quarter of a mile away, in the highest spirits. There, it is true, he was handed over to an elderly woma who showed him into a neat little bedroom; but when he had washe and brushed himself and returned to the hall, Miss Larch, still ros and smiling, was waiting for him. He wanted to shake hands wit her all over again. She wore a charming blue dress that gave plac at the knee, to silk stockings of a most admirable contour; the fi freckles dotted about her small nose were delicious in themselves; sh had large blue eyes, thickly fringed, and they seemed to twinkle wh they were turned upon him. It was incredible that she should be daughter of either Ephraim or Gad.

"You don't look a bit like a Second Resurrectionist," he boldly co fided on the way back. And then, of course, he had to tell her wh a Second Resurrectionist did look like, and drew a strong picture of bony female that made her laugh. Didn't she look like that, then? S didn't, he replied with fervour, and left her more rosy and smiling th ever. But he too didn't look like one, she told him. He wasn't o Then what was he doing there? He explained shortly, then drew fr her an explanation of her own presence on the scene. She had li there for the last eighteen months, Mrs. Grudy being her mother's sis and she helped in the house and it was all very, very dull, though uncle and aunt were very, very kind, but there was nothing really to and everybody who came was either old or stuffy or both, and nob talked about anything but the Bible and the lost tribes and the Pyram and sometimes she thought it was silly and then at other times had to believe in it, they were all so sure about it, and then she felt was awfully wicked and was a bit frightened, yes, awfully fright sometimes. It all came out in one breathless rush, and it was evi that Miss Larch—Freda—had not exchanged confidences with an for a long time. By the time they reached the hall, they were n much friends as fellow conspirators, for Youth, when it is exiled the kingdoms of the old, at once turns itself into the strongest of s societies. At the door, Inigo glanced meaningly at the crimson le and Freda glanced at them too. Then their eyes met.

The door was closed but they opened it softly and peeped in. S sixty or seventy people were sitting at the long tea-tables. They not eating but listening to Mr. Grudy, who was apparently conclu address from the platform at the far end of the room. He boomed for some little time before Inigo could make out what he was saying, t his final quotation from the Bible he carried in his hand came clearly ough, and Inigo, peeping over Freda's shoulder, heard it with a sense incredulity, as if all Oxwell were some fantastic dream.

"And it shall come to pass," roared Mr. Grudy, "in that day, that his rden shall be taken away from off thy shoulder, and his yoke from thy neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing. is come to Aiath, he is passed to Migron; at Michmash he hath laid his carriages." Then, after a suitable pause, Mr. Grudy stepped vn from the platform. "Let us have tea," he said in a milder voice, l instantly there was a babel.

It looks as if we've come to Michmash, absolutely," muttered Inigo.

Timpany had reserved a space for them next to him, but the table so crowded and the others had been sitting there so long that not ch of the space was left, for they were using long wooden forms not chairs. Freda sat down, then Inigo jammed himself between and Timpany, who was almost steaming. "Warm in here, isn't he said to Inigo. "But a splendid gathering, really splendid!"

may have been a splendid gathering but it was certainly a very meal. Inigo remembered other high teas but none higher than The forms were a solid mass of eaters and drinkers, and the tables a solid mass of food. There were hams and tongues and rounds old beef and raised pies and egg salads; plates heaped high with e bread, brown bread, currant tea-cakes, scones; dishes of jelly and rd and blanc-mange and fruit salad; piles of jam tarts and maids of ur and cream puffs and almond tarts; then walnut cake, plum chocolate cake, coconut cake; mounds of sugar, quarts of cream, a steady flood of tea. Inigo never remembered seeing so much before. It was like being asked to eat one's way through the Pro-n and Cooked Food departments of one of the big stores. The ite was not tickled, not even met fairly; it was overwhelmed. The of these tables drove hunger out of the world, made it impossible agine it had ever been there. Inigo ate this and that, but he hardly what he was eating, he was so warm, so tightly wedged in, so ed at the spectacle. The Second Resurrectionists were worthy of the colossal meal spread before them. This highest of high teas h met its match. If they had all been forty years in the wilderness, th could not have dealt with it more manfully. They were not y gabbling, laughing eaters; they did not make a first rush and th suddenly lose heart; they did not try this and taste that. No, they w quiet, systematic, devastating; they advanced steadily in good or from the first slice of ham to the last slice of chocolate cake; and in fi minutes the tables were a mere ruin of broken meats, the flood of a pale and tepid trickle. Inigo, who retired early from the confl though he had to stay where he was, with Mr. Timpany steaming one side and Freda delicately grilling on the other, looked on w wonder and admiration. Across the table were two middle-aged wom with long yellow faces, almost exactly alike, and a little round m who had no teeth and whose nose and chin came within an inch of another as he worked away. It did not look as if three such pers would be able to do more than skirt the fringes of a high tea, actually they walked right through and emerged unruffled at other end. Above their heads, high on the opposite wall, was another of Mr. Grudy's crimson placards, which began: *And the l of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee.* Inigo stared, now the people, now at the placard. It was all very odd, absolutely.

Tea was over. Freda disappeared; Mr. Timpany was borne a by the daughters of Ephraim and Gad; and Inigo strolled outsid taste the air, which had a novel and delicious flavour. After tha smoked a pipe and sauntered up and down the road, keeping an on the door so that he should not miss the fair Freda. A few bel Resurrectionists, whose work had kept them from the last Grudy tea but two that this world would know, hurried into the hall. T a large car arrived and carefully deposited on the road several per who evidently could not be expected to grapple with a high tea. T was a tremendous middle-aged woman, purple and commanding, was attended, as such women so often are attended, by a thin depre looking girl in a frock she had never liked. There was also a tall with an excessively long and lean and brown face and a military bea Inigo watched these three new arrivals sail, drift, and march int all. Then he caught a glimpse of Freda's blue frock in the doorway.

"Well," he asked her, "when does the meeting begin?"

"In a minute," she replied. "The nobs have arrived. Did you see em? They won't come to the tea, they're too grand. That woman ith the red face and the big nose is Mrs. Bevison-Burr, and that's her ughter with her—she never says a single word and wears the most vful clothes. And the man with them is Major Dunker. He's rather ce, but he's a bit cracked."

"Never mind. We're all a bit cracked."

"You may be," retorted Freda, "but I'm not——"

"I know what you're going to say next," he told her.

"You don't."

"I do. You were going to say 'So there!'"

"No, I wasn't," cried Freda. Then she made a little face at him, inly asking for more. This was Freda's idea of conversation. After ing in corners so long and listening to stuffy old people who said ngs that were either silly or downright frightening, to contradict a ung man who smiled at her and had nice eyes—it was lovely. So go exchanged a little more of this stuff—"sandbag badinage"—he led it—and had time to reflect that if she had worn steel spectacles scaled three stone more, he could not have done it, would have n elsewhere. As it was, he too was happy, delighted with Freda self, with the phrase he had just made, and with his own ironical ections.

t was time, however, for the meeting, the gathering, the convention vhatever it was—to begin. The tea things had been cleared away, tables moved back, and all the forms ranged in front of the little form. Now Mr. Grudy, Mrs. Bevison-Burr, Major Dunker, and Mr. npany marched on to the platform and looked as if they were about sing a quartette. Everybody else made a rush at the forms. Freda Inigo were among the last, with the result that they had to squeeze at the end of one of the back forms. Freda was jammed against a v stout woman, who smiled at her and patted her hand. Inigo was med against Freda and in order to sit there at all he had to hold on he form itself, just at the back of Freda. There was really only of him on the form.

Mr. Grudy stepped to the front of the platform and surveyed th
with a benevolent patriarchal stare, as if he saw before him his shephe
and bowmen and handmaidens and flocks and herds. Then he lif
a hand. Immediately everybody leaned forward and covered their fa
Inigo was not sure what was about to happen, but he leaned forward
with a sharp jerk, so that the arm behind Freda slipped up and lan
somewhere in the neighbourhood of her waist. She shook herself
whispered something. "Sorry, couldn't help it," he began whisper
and at the same time, by a gigantic effort, contrived to remove the in
cently offending arm. She gave him a fierce little Sh-sh-sh. Mr. Gr
was opening with a prayer. It was rather a long prayer, and Inigo
so uncomfortable, his body being twisted at a fiendish angle, that
found it impossible to listen to it. Nevertheless he was in symp
with it, for Mr. Grudy continually referred to captivities and migrat
across great deserts and Inigo felt them in every limb.

When everybody sat up again at the end of the prayer, Mr. Gr
stood there, very erect, and did nothing but look at them for at
two minutes. Inigo wondered what would happen next.

"Jee-ee ——" sang Mr. Grudy.

Everybody jumped up at once—except Inigo. He sat there a se
too long; his end of the form went down and he fell with a c
the other end shooting up and slightly forward, hurled a little r
man—it was the toothless one—into the seat in front; and there w
confusion and uproar. The hymn could not begin until the little
had been restored to his own row, the seat had been put back i
place, and Inigo, crimson, dusty and furious, had scrambled to his

"Jee-ee ——" sang Mr. Grudy again, and this time they were
Inigo did not sing, for the hymn was one he had never heard b
He felt foolish. When they came to sit down again, he felt still
foolish because the few inches allotted to him had now been swall
up. He was about to abandon the seat altogether, to go and
against the wall, when Freda captured about six inches from the
lady on her right and offered it to him so prettily that he coul
refuse. And there he sat, very close, for the rest of the evening.

Mr. E. G. Timpany was called upon to address them. Mois
triumphant, he stepped forward, clutching at a large bundle of

nd looked all gold spectacles and teeth and preposterous auburn curls. Ie beamed upon them. For such moments as these he would gladly ave sold all Wolverhampton. He produced figures, compared the umbers in Ephraim with those in Dan, was convinced that Gad would oon outstrip Issachar and even gave them percentages. Indeed, he made uch good use of his correspondence course in accountancy that Inigo xpected him at any moment to remember his other course and drop nto Commercial Spanish. It was impossible not to like Mr. Timpany, e was so innocently happy, so naïvely proud of his position as organising cretary. Inigo found it quite painful to think that just when Mr. Timany was beginning to enjoy this life, he would either have to quit or be compelled to admit he was a fool—unless it was possible for e Second Resurrectionists continually to postpone Doomsday.

Mrs. Bevison-Burr, the commanding woman, came next. Her subct was Unbelief. She referred to Unbelief as if it were a very obnoxious rson who was in the habit of insulting her every morning and eveng. Mrs. Bevison-Burr commanded them to do all manner of things Unbelief. She did not hold out any great hopes for them when ey had done all these things. Only a few of them were wanted by hovah, but the least they could all do was to settle Unbelief. They ere asked to remember that Unbelief and Bolshevism were one and e same. There was little more about Jehovah, to whom she referred if he were a prominent politician staying at her country house. Mrs. vison-Burr was not a success, though her presence there was evintly gratifying to most of her audience.

Major Dunker followed. His themes were the Pyramids, internanal relations, and earthquakes. Holding a little notebook very close his face, he talked at some length of pyramid inches, which demined all the chief dates in the world's history, but it was difficult follow this part of his speech because of the notebook. He passed to international relations, which were rapidly approaching a supreme sis. We were on the eve of the greatest and the last of all wars, real Armageddon. But worse was to come. Earthquakes. Everyly had noticed that in recent years there had been more and more rms and floods and earthquakes, and scientists had been all baffled these phenomena. All over the world they were investigating to dis-

cover the causes of these disturbances. They could find nothing. Th
causes were not in the mere rise and fall of the barometer nor eve
in spots in the sun. Forces were being let loose upon this planet th
had formerly been restrained. These were the first activities of t
newly released Prince of Darkness. *And when the thousand years a*
expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison. And having deliver
this quotation in the same dry tones he had used throughout, the Maj
abruptly concluded. He was, Inigo decided, quietly and decently m

Mr. Grudy called for the testimony of other friends. Nobody spo
for a minute or two. Then a man with a black beard jumped up, sa
something about King George the Fifth being the ninety-ninth in su
cession from King David, and then sat down again. He was follow
by a shrill little woman, who declared that she had dreamt four tin
that year of an angel waving something that looked like a gol
coal-scuttle over the dome of St. Paul's. Mr. Grudy nodded appr
ingly at her, but there seemed to be a general impression that she h
not done well in putting herself forward in this way. After that th
was another wait. Then Mr. Grudy stepped forward again and w
about to address them when there was a stir at the back of the hal

"I see that our friend, the Reverend Higginworth Wenderby,
arrived," cried Mr. Grudy. "I am sure he will be pleased to give
his testimony. It is a privilege to have him here with us."

A tall stout man in black climbed on to the platform, and st
there, panting and mopping his brow, while they applauded furiou
He was a curious figure. He had a mane of dark hair and an
usually large, white, wet face, which retreated at the forehead and
chin. "My dear friends," he boomed, "please allow me a moment
cannot talk to you without breath, and I have come here in such h
that I have no breath." Everybody applauded again, including In
who looked round and saw that a change had come over the w
meeting. Everybody seemed expectant. They were leaning forw
now, all eager attention.

Mr. Wenderby held up a large white hand. "My friends," he be
softly this time, "it is a joy to address you once more, and there
not many joys in this vale of suffering and sorrow. We live her
sin, and Death is busy among the people. The husband must go f

e wife, and the mother must weep over the departed child." He ntinued in this strain for some time, his voice as artful and moving a passage for muted strings. The matter was nothing, the manner erything; and even Inigo, who had disliked the man at sight, found mself vaguely moved. As for the rest of his audience, they frankly andoned themselves to the luxury of easy emotion. Some of the men sobbed. Freda stirred uneasily and bit her underlip. Inigo sat re in both physical and mental discomfort.

Mr. Wenderby paused and let his huge head droop. Then he raised higher and higher, until at last his white wet face seemed to shine the light. "But have I come here, my friends, to bear testimony to se things?" he asked, without raising his voice. "Are they strange ngs, these of sin and misery and death, that I should come and ite them to you? Have I nothing more to say? Is this the end our message?" He stepped forward another pace, so that he stood the very edge of the platform. "No," he thundered. "No, and a usand times, no!"

Ephraim!" yelled a voice in Inigo's ear.

I beg your pardon," he cried, startled. But the man, who had drawn a chair just behind Inigo, took no notice whatever of him but stared dly at the preacher.

look for the Word, and the Word is here." Mr. Wenderby, now ll diapason, held up his Bible. "And after these things," he chanted, eard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Sal- on, and glory, and honour, and power unto the Lord our God. true and righteous are his judgments; for he hath judged the great re, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath ged the blood of his servants at her hand. And again they said, luia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever." Mr. Wenderby crumbled the world to dust and blew it away in one mighty shout. led the faithful to their eternal home. He arrayed them in fine and took them through the gates of pearl and along the streets of gold to where the river of the water of life flowed from the throne e Lamb.

e arms he raised seemed to lift most of his audience out of their If they had groaned before, now they shouted. Only Mrs. Bevison-Burr and Major Dunker remained unmoved. Mr. Timpany h taken off his spectacles and was wiping them feverishly. Mr. Gru towered in his chair and his face grew bright in the glow of uns desert suns. Inigo looked round in astonishment. The place wa pandemonium. Face after face, almost transfigured, caught and h his glance. This then was the secret, these moments, crashing in Dio siac rout through months of boredom, glittering and trumpeting fo space in lives as quiet and faded as an old photograph. Somethi pitiful tugged at his heart, then was gone.

Mr. Wenderby, dripping and paler than ever, blessed them ferven All was over. There was a rush to the platform. "What do we now?" asked Inigo.

"Let's go, shall we?" said Freda. "It wasn't quite so frightening time, but it was bad enough. You feel better about it all outside, noticed."

They walked up the road, cheerfully libelling all the Second Re rectionists, but when they arrived at the house, Freda hesitated. "I pose I ought to go in, really. My aunt may want me to help her supper."

"Supper!" Inigo was horrified. "There can't be supper, not after tea. Surely none of 'em will want supper—unless they're going to up all night."

"Yes, they will. They're awful greedies, I can tell you. And U will be bringing some of them in. That's why I don't want to g They'll talk and talk and talk, and I've had enough of it, hav you?"

He admitted that he had had a good deal of it. They strolled a a mile further up the road, stood on a bridge and talked nons and then returned to the house. Freda did not go in, however, crept up to a lighted window and peeped through a space bet the drawn curtains.

"They are there," she announced, "and they're eating sandwi Didn't I say they would?"

"It's incredible," Inigo cried softly. "They can't go on puttin away like this. They simply will bring the world to an end. I see Timpany's teeth just fastening on a wretched sandwich. Horrible, orrible! Come away."

Freda had another peep, then joined him. "Mr. Wenderby's there. I don't like him, do you? He's the queerest of them all, I think. Do ou know, he always calls me 'Little sister'——"

"Like his infernal cheek!"

"And—and—he always looks as if he wants to kiss me. He doesn't, ou know——"

"I should think not."

"But I always feel he would if I didn't dodge. He frightens me."

"Then he's a vile brute," cried Inigo. He was quite indignant. The rm he slipped round her, as she stood there looking so defenceless, o prettily forlorn, quivered with righteous indignation.

"Do you think so?" she murmured, not stirring except to lift her ace a little.

"Beyond the pale, absolutely," said Inigo firmly. He saw her fair ace tilting until it caught the light. He saw the dark curve of her outh. It was irresistible. He bent forward, and at that very moment e front door opened. Before anybody could come out, Freda had own round the corner. Inigo went after her but by the time he had aught up to her they had been all round the house and were back gain at the front door.

In the hall they met Mr. Timpany. "A splendid gathering, wasn't ?" he called to them.

They replied, breathlessly, that it was, absolutely splendid.

"Now don't tell me you're sorry you came, Mr. Jollifant," Mr. Tim- any continued. "Don't tell me you weren't interested."

"I won't," said Inigo, shaking him by the hand.

II

n the following night, Wednesday, Inigo was sauntering through the reets of Nottingham. He had not gone there to look for Mr. Morton itcham, though he had reminded himself, with a certain quickening of terest, that this was Mr. Mitcham's destination, where, like the gentle- an of leisure he was, he had decided to look up a few old friends. t any moment, Inigo told himself, he might be passing an old friend of Mr. Mitcham's. Inigo was there, however, because at the breakfa table that morning Freda had declared that she must go to Nottingha to visit a dentist. It then appeared at once that Inigo, who had bee rather vague about his movements, was really on his way to Nottingha too. This astonishing coincidence had landed the pair of them on th same motorbus from Oxwell, given them the same table for lunch, an finally, at Freda's request, had condemned them to spend the afterno together, and some of it unnecessarily close together, in a huge sensuo cavern that called itself a picture palace.

Inigo did not care very much for films, especially in the middle o the afternoon, when their bludgeoning sentimentality, their glyceri tears, seemed downright blasphemy. This picture palace had an org that was nothing but one gigantic, relentless, quavering *vox huma* stop, and listening to it was like being forcibly fed with treacle. Ho ever, Freda, having escaped from the wilderness of Oxwell, the ca tivity of the Second Resurrectionists, enjoyed it all. She munch chocolates, drank tea, ate little cakes, and coughed her way through tw cigarettes; she laughed when the screen told her to laugh, stared mour fully when all was lost save love and the *vox humana* stop, shudder and gasped and clutched at Inigo at all appropriate crises; and fill in the duller intervals in the programme by flirting with him. They we in there so long that Inigo was surprised to emerge, blinking, in broad daylight, and for a moment or so the sane and three-dimension world about him looked quite unreal. It also made him feel rath foolish, and somehow he said good-bye to Freda, still rosy and smili as she mounted the 6.15 motorbus, with a feeling that was more li relief than regret. He returned to the mournful little commercial hot where he had left his knapsack and there had a very bad dinner.

After wandering about the streets for quarter of an hour or so, Ini turned into the nearest tavern for a glass of bitter. The place w almost empty, fortunately, for he wanted to be quiet and to thin What was he going to do? Should he wander on like this for a fe days more, then return to his uncle's place at Dulwich and, once the go the rounds of the scholastic agents? Did he want to go on teac ing? No, he did not. But what did he want to do? He didn't kno He could afford to give himself a little holiday, but sooner or lat e would have to decide about a job. This was an opportunity to xperiment, certainly, but what was he going to experiment in? Journal- m? His soul revolted, absolutely. It was while he was still telling imself how much his soul revolted or was prepared to revolt that e landlord came in and nodded to him.

“Breakin’ up now,” said the landlord. “But we can’t grumble, can e? ’Ad a good month.”

Inigo never knew what to reply to remarks of this kind about the eather. People who made them always seemed to belong to a society weather observers or even weather owners, and he always felt that himself was too much of an outsider to do more than merely mum- e something in response. He mumbled now, then hesitated, and finally marked: “I’ve just been wondering what to do. Now what would u do if you were a young man like me, with a little, just a very little, oney of your own?”

“I wouldn’t go into this business again,” replied the landlord promptly.

“You wouldn’t eh?”

“Wouldn’t touch it, wouldn’t have it given. Nothing in it now. All pieces. What with dogs, football, pitchers, one thing and another you can’t sell beer, can’t get ’em regular, yer know. Oh, I wouldn’t k at it.” He straddled in front of the fireplace and jingled some ppers in his pocket.

“Well, what would you do?” asked Inigo.

“If I’d my time over again, I wouldn’t ’esitate,” replied the landlord, vering his voice. “I’d make a book, go in the ring. It’s money for st. They can’t give it to you fast enough. Why, there’s fellers come ’ere—tut-t-t——” And he tut-tutted away and wagged his head to w that mere words were failing him.

‘Be a bookie, eh? That’s no good to me, I’m afraid. Nothing in my e. I don’t understand racing and I couldn’t shout loud enough.”

‘Don’t need to shout, don’t need to know anything,” cried the other. me o’ these fellers ’ardly know where they live. Doesn’t matter. ey get it all the same. Rolling in it, rolling! And where do they it from, where do they get it from?” He walked right across room to ask this momentous question and stood over Inigo, who d him he didn’t know where they got it from. “All right, I’ll tell you," said the landlord. "They get it from mugs, like you and m Mugs! Don't they, Charlie?" This was to a man who had just e tered the room.

"That's right, Jack," said Charlie, winking at Inigo. "I don't kno what you're talking about, but that's right." And he sat down, push his cap to the back of his head, and began whistling very loudly.

"'Ere, Charlie," said the landlord, "what's this about old Fred tellin Jimmy you said I'd picked up a tenner on Cherry Lass?"

Inigo made his escape. The streets were lighted now and liveli but the only entertainment they offered him was that of watching i numerable youths ogle innumerable pairs of over-powdered and und nourished young girls, who took care to parade within easy reach the various picture theatres. He soon came to the conclusion that the streets were not lively at all. They began to depress him. He thoug once of going in, to add a few sentences to *The Last Knapsack,* b the image of that melancholy commercial hotel daunted him. No go literature could be composed in that hotel. "It would all come o wrong," he told himself. "I should be putting down 'as per yours' a things like that."

He stopped outside a large and glittering tavern. It announced th it had a Singing Room, and Inigo did not remember ever having be inside a Singing Room. He walked in, to find himself facing a lo curved bar that had far too many mirrors and electric lights. Busin was brisk, so brisk that the bar counter was flooded, the change received was all wet, and the beer itself had a nasty rinsed look. The were several swing doors, gorgeous with leaded lights, opening out this bar, but there was nothing to indicate the one that would adm him to the Singing Room. He took a sip of beer, put the glass dow and determined to forget about it, and began dodging through t throng, to find the Singing Room. It was then that he heard, behi the back of a man who held one of the swing doors open, the voi "In the absence of the pianist, ladies and gentlemen," said the voi "I will not give you one of my famous banjo solos, but I will, with t kind permission of one and all, endeavour to entertain you with a f feats of sleight of hand."

There was no mistaking it. This was the voice of that return veller, that gentleman of leisure, that looker-up of old friends in ottingham, Mr. Morton Mitcham.

Inigo pushed his way in. This was the Singing Room, and there, the far end of it, near the piano, addressing an audience of about enty men, youths, and girls, who did not seem particularly interested him, was Mr. Morton Mitcham. He wore the same light check it, the same Mad Hatter collar and tie; and his eyebrows seemed ger, his nose richer, and his chin longer and bluer than they did be- e. "I will open," he was saying, "with a little trick I've performed all parts of the world, America, Australia, India, and every important ce in the U-nited Kingdom—except Nottingham. Notice that, ladies d gentlemen,—except Nottingham." He held out a pack of cards. ow I want a lady or gentleman to take a card——"

‘Any orders?" cried a waiter suddenly springing up from nowhere.

‘Wairer, I wanternother double." This was from a very ripe gentle- n, who was sprawling at a little table by himself.

Inigo told the waiter to bring him a bottle of Bass and sat down t far from the ripe gentleman and near a middle-aged man and a le woman with eye-glasses who were sitting over two glasses of ut and placidly holding hands. Mr. Mitcham stared at the new- ner, brought his immense eyebrows down and pursed up his lips. igo grinned at him and at last got a nod and a grin in return. Mr. itcham, who clearly did not want to begin his trick until the waiter d returned, crossed over and calmly remarked to Inigo: "I know u, my boy, and I see you know me. I'm just trying to place you."

‘We met the other midnight at Dullingham Junction," said Inigo.

‘Of course we did. And you had the chocolate and biscuits. And nerry little session we had, didn't we?" He lowered his voice. "I'm t filling in the evening here, you know, just amusing myself. This 't my kind of thing at all."

‘No, I should think not. Have a drink?"

‘Thank you, my boy, I will. I'll have a whisky, just a—well, you ght as well make it a double Scotch." He lowered his voice again. you told most people you'd seen Morton Mitcham here, they wouldn't lieve, simply wouldn't believe you. But it amuses me, you know.

And I like to show these boys and girls a thing or two. They've se nothing, absolutely nothing."

The waiter having returned and departed again for the double whisk Mr. Mitcham began his performance. A man in a brown hat far t small for him was persuaded to take a card. "Look at that card, si said Mr. Mitcham impressively, "examine it carefully. You may sh it to any other members of the audience, but don't let me see it, ha-h Now take this envelope, an ordinary plain white envelope, you o serve, and place the card in the envelope and put the flap inside. Do lick the envelope, sir, I may want it again. Now I take the envelo It is impossible for me to see what the card is. Now follow me close I shall place the envelope——"

But here the ripe gentleman created a diversion. "Never mind abo cards," he cried thickly. "I wanner a bit o' music."

"I say, I shall place the envelope underneath this handkerchief—

"I wanner a bit o' music."

Mr. Mitcham frowned at him. "All in good time, sir, all in go time. Just now I'm trying to entertain the company with this tric I shall be much obliged, sir," he said severely, "if you will not int rupt."

"Thaz all ri', thaz all ri'!" he waved a hand, and a large and idio smile slowly spread over his rubicund face.

"It is, you will observe, an ordinary handkerchief. I slip the envelo underneath——"

"Ber I like a bit o' music."

Mr. Mitcham stopped and glared. Two or three members of h audience laughed, but a young man in a green cloth cap was ve annoyed. "Oh, put a sock in it," he said to the ripe gentleman, wh immediately and very loudly asked him what he meant by it.

"Now then, gentlemen, give order *if* you please," cried the wait who had returned with Mr. Mitcham's double whisky. They ga order, and Mr. Mitcham was able to finish the trick, which he did b producing the card that was placed in the envelope from the midd of the pack, to the astonishment and admiration of everybody exce the ripe gentleman and the two people who were holding hands. Ini himself thought it a very good trick indeed. The young man in th

en cap was loud in his admiration. "Clever!" he cried aggressively.
nd new to me. Clever!"

I seen it done once before," said the man who had first taken the
d. "Fellow at the Hippodrome 'ere done it."

May I ask his name, sir," said Mr. Mitcham, frowning. "Because
t's my trick. I think you must be mistaken."

No, I'm not," replied the other, mildly though firmly. "I seen it
right. And I'll tell you his name. The Great Julius, that was him.
e Great Julius. He was a Yank."

You're right, you're right," cried Mr. Mitcham, with hearty con-
cension. "If it was the Great Julius, you're right. I taught him that
k in Philadelphia in 1910. There was no Great Julius about him
n, I can tell you. He was just plain Julius Isenbaum, and nobody
ld be plainer. Yes, I taught him that trick."

nigo gazed at him in admiration, caught his eye and indicated the
sence of the whisky. The great man strode across, gave him a wink
"the best, my boy!", and halved the liquor in one gulp. Then he
duced a number of cards from his elbow, his knee, and the empty
and finally asked the young man in the green cap, who still said
ever!" at intervals, to put the four queens wherever he liked in
pack. Mr. Mitcham then shuffled the pack, held it up in one hand,
d it up in the other hand, and put it down on the nearest table. The
r queens, however, he produced from the pocket of the ripe gentle-
n, who had fallen into a doze. This delighted everybody except
ripe gentleman himself, who hit the table and cried: "All a lorrer
nkum! Lessav a birrer music."

That's right. Where's Joe?" asked some one.

Joe's the pianist," Mr. Mitcham explained to Inigo. "Regular job
e, you know, but hasn't turned up tonight. Here's the vocalist," and
waved a hand at a rather short and flat-faced man who had just
ered the room. "He can't do anything, either. But I shall try 'em
h the banjo soon, pianist or no pianist. I've kept a whole room going
h that banjo in places where there wasn't a piano within two or three
ndred miles. Believe me, my boy, I've travelled a hundred and fifty
es just to play it at a wedding party. That was up in Saskatchewan
time, Ninety-five or Ninety-six, I think it was." He finished the

whisky, then added: "No, it wasn't. I'm not telling you the tru Inigo gasped. "It was in Ninety-four," Mr. Mitcham conclu triumphantly.

Inigo glanced across at the piano, which was an ancient gr "Look here," he said finally, "I think I could knock something ou that, if you really want a pianist."

"Of course you could," cried Mr. Mitcham enthusiastically. "Di you tell me the other night you played? You're the very man w looking for. Let me see—your name's just slipped—oh, Jollifant, is Of course it is." He beckoned the vocalist and rose impressively at approach. "Meet Mr. Jollifant, an old friend of mine, who's just tur up and who's one of the finest pianists that's ever stepped into town. He's just promised to help us out."

Five minutes later Inigo found himself sitting at the piano with s tattered sheets of music in front of him. It had been arranged that vocalist should take his turn first. Inigo ran his fingers over the k which were very yellow, burned in places, and far too loose. The p itself, however, was better than he had imagined it to be, and certainly capable of making a terrific din. He dashed into the ope bars of the first tattered song, and the vocalist, in a voice so hard so high that it hurt, proclaimed to the Singing Room that he lived la-and of rer-hoses but he drer-heamed of a la-land of sner-how. the conclusion of this astonishing ballad there was a certain amoun applause, led by the ripe gentleman, who had been beating time humming in a vague sort of way. The vocalist treated his rav throat to a draught of stout, waited until six newcomers had sat d and given orders, then nodded to Inigo and declared, in his highest hardest notes, that the woman for him in all the world was just his old mother. This was a sentiment that aroused the enthusiasm of company, and one after another of them joined in until at last they w all asserting that the one woman for them was just their dear mothers. By the time it was ended, the room was nearly full, and th was so much applause that the vocalist, now purple in the face, had "thank them one and all" and burst into an encore. Here agai appeared they had all a common enthusiasm, this time for dear Ireland, especially the colleen in the cabin back in Connemara. C igo, Mr. Morton Mitcham, and the waiter appeared to have no tender emories of this colleen.

The vocalist departed; Mr. Mitcham began tuning his banjo; the aiter collected orders and told Inigo to give it a name; more people me crowding in and filled the room with smoke and babble; Mr. itcham whispered instructions and hummed tunes in Inigo's ear; e waiter dumped glasses of beer and whisky on the piano; the ripe ntleman vainly demanded more double Scotches; and Inigo emptied e glass in front of him and began to feel excited.

Off they went, softly at first, Mr. Mitcham wagging his head to his ting twanka-pang, twanka-pang, Inigo vamping away and putting artful variations. More and more people came crowding in, to pper-tap-tap with their feet. Mr. Mitcham wagged furiously, quickning the pace. Inigo never lagged behind for a second and the louder nd faster they went, the crazier were his elaborations. He would ring down both hands to crash and rumble in the bass and then ould send them tinkling like hey-go-mad in the tréble. "Quiet!" cried r. Mitcham, and then played as softly and solemnly as it is possible play a banjo; indeed, you would not have thought it possible. Then, fter a minute of this—"let her go!" he cried. And they let her go, a triumph of twanging and panging and tinkling and crashing. nd when it was done, the Singing Room let itself go too. There was uch a din that the landlord himself looked in and was delighted to see ow enthusiastic and hot and thirsty everybody appeared to be.

"With your permission, ladies and gentlemen," said Mr. Mitcham, fter he had acknowledged the applause, mopped his face, and drained is glass, "a little impression of a military patrol. I may say that I irst thought of this number when listening to some of our own brave oys up at—er—Allahabad."

There was a great stamping of feet and banging of glasses, and a ed-faced man roared out that the banjoist was a good old somethingr-other "wallah." Mr. Mitcham bowed his acknowledgments, then roduced his impression of a military patrol, which he did simply playng a quickstep very softly at first and gradually increasing the tone. As no accompaniment was necessary, Inigo took another drink from hose that were still steadily finding their way to the top of the piano,

looked about him, and tried, not very successfully, to simmer do
and give the appearance of being an old hand. The military pa
was a tremendous success, and Mr. Mitcham had to give the latter h
of it all over again. He then waved a hand to show that he was co
pletely exhausted. "You give 'em something," he told Inigo, and empt
several glasses.

Inigo promptly played some of his own little tunes, finally arrivi
at the one we all know too well now, his *Slipping round the Corn*
While he was still strumming it quietly, he heard a queer clinking sou
and saw the long lean figure of Mr. Morton Mitcham moving ab
the crowded room. That gentleman of leisure was undoubtedly goi
round with the hat. Inigo had a shock, but it did not last long. "
for a penny, in for a pound," he told himself; and then added: "If it
a pound." He could hear the feet tapping to his tune. Perhaps he
not play it as well as he had done at Washbury Manor—now a lit
dark place thousands of miles away—but he ended by playing it ev
faster and louder. Nor did he end alone, for Mr. Mitcham, presumab
with the hat, returned to join in with admirable gusto, having pick
up the tune. The whole Singing Room was slipping round the corn

"Time, gentlemen, please!" the waiter shouted, but nobody appear
to take any notice of him, except the two performers, who came to
triumphant conclusion. There was no doubt about their receptio
The Singing Room had not heard so enthusiastic applause for year
Three glasses were broken. There were cries of "Encore" and "kee
on, boys." But Mr. Mitcham, still the dignified performer in spite
his dripping face and the innumerable drinks he had consumed, sho
his head at Inigo.

"Time, gentlemen, if *you* please!" cried the waiter again, now in a
agony of supplication. Several moist enthusiasts insisted upon shakin
the musicians by the hand, and there was trouble with the ripe gentl
man, who was crawling about the floor looking for his hat; but gra
ually the room was cleared. Inigo felt rather dazed. He saw M
Mitcham very carefully counting a heap of small change. Then h
discovered the landlord at his elbow.

"You can tickle 'em all right," said the landlord, pointing to th
keyboard. "'Ere, 'alf a minute." And he dragged Inigo to one side

thirty bob a week's any good to you," he said, lowering his voice, nd all the drinks you want, the job's yours and Joe can go to 'ell."

"Thanks," Inigo found himself muttering, "but I don't want the job, that's what you mean."

"What's the matter with it?" the landlord demanded. "You won't t better money in this town, let me tell you."

"But I'm not staying on in this town."

"Ah, that's different, that is. Well, you can tickle 'em all right. ive us a call and a tune any time you're round this way. 'Ere." And dragged Inigo back again, to where Mr. Mitcham was counting his ppers. "This is my little contribution, gentlemen." He threw a ten illing note on the heap, drew Mr. Mitcham on one side to whisper him, then shouted to the waiter and walked away.

Mr. Mitcham wrapped up the money in a handkerchief. "I know place where they'll give us a decent little feed, that is, decent for these rts. There's no *food* really here, of course; you mustn't expect it. ow what about giving ourselves a little supper? I've hardly had bite all day, didn't want it, you know. I'm so used to feeding late. ome on then; it's not far, just near the station."

They sat in the window of the upstairs room of the unpretentious ttle restaurant, which was almost empty. Inigo ordered a mere snack, ut Mr. Mitcham, who gave Inigo the impression of having been on ort commons for a day or two, asked for large steaks and bushels of nions and potatoes. As soon as the waitress had gone, he brought out e handkerchief containing the money. "Now then," he began, "the ndlord made it ten, didn't he? And the takings in the room were wenty-three shillings and ninepence ha'penny. That's exactly thirty-hree shillings and ninepence ha'penny. Now what's half of that?"

"Sixteen and something," replied Inigo. "But why do you want to now? Are you thinking of dividing it between us?"

"Naturally, my boy, naturally! Like an honest trouper! No quibbling bout shares, either. I don't say," he added thoughtfully, "that some f this might not have been a little appreciation of my sleight of hand, nd of course you'd nothing to do with that. That card in the envelope rick went devilishly well, you know. But—share and share alike, I ay, and no quibbling."

"I can't take any of it. It's jolly good of you, but I can't."

"You can't?"

"No. You see——"

Mr. Mitcham patted him on the arm and at the same time, with gr dexterity, swept all the money away with the other hand. "My d boy, of course I see. You've no need to tell me."

"I did it for a lark, you see——"

"Just for the fun of the thing and to oblige a friend," cried M Mitcham enthusiastically. "And naturally you wouldn't touch a pen of it. I know, because that's just how I feel myself. Done it mys many a time. Ask them in Toronto what Morton Mitcham did old Reilly's benefit, or for that fire concert in 'Frisco, or the time wh the stage hands went out at Melbourne. I know your feelings, kn them to a hair, my dear boy. They're the feelings of a gentleman, musician, a true artist. You remind me—everything you've done h reminded me of Captain Dunstan-Carew—played for me, played wi me, scores of times out in India, and 'Proud to do it, Mitcham,' he say, and he was the best amateur pianist out there—*and* a Dunsta Carew. You've both got the same touch—recognised it in a minute a gentlemanly touch, but full of fun, plenty of devil in it."

Inigo said he was proud to have the same touch as Captain Dunsta Carew.

"But I'll tell you one thing, my boy," continued Mr. Mitcham. "Y may not let me give you a share of the takings, but you're going to l me pay for this supper. I insist. I don't care what you're having t night, I insist. The supper is mine." He looked first at Inigo an then round the room with such an air of noble generosity that Inig found it difficult to remember that his own share of the supper woul only amount to about tenpence.

"For that matter, of course," said Mr. Mitcham, after he had wolfed i silence the greater part of his steak, "this business tonight's been a mer piece of foolery with me. As I told you before, I think, it's not at al my line of country. But, the fact is, I've been unlucky just lately You know what it is. Twenty years ago I was landed in the sam damned hole. No, it was worse. I was down there in Memphis——"

"Not Memphis!" cried Inigo in delight.

Memphis," replied Mr. Mitcham firmly. "And I hadn't a nickel my name. And you can imagine what a hole Memphis is when you ven't a cent."

"Rather!" cried Inigo. "You couldn't be in a worse place, could u?" He said this with conviction, though actually all that he knew out Memphis was that it is a city somewhere in the United States.

"You couldn't. Well, three months afterwards, exactly three months where was I? I'll tell you. I was in a suite on the first floor of the st hotel in all New Orleans, and telegrams pouring in, just pouring Go here, go there, go everywhere! Three syndicates all eating out my hand! I don't say it will be the same all over again *exactly*. Times ve changed, my boy, you can take it from me. There's not enough oney in this country. But, as I was saying, I've been unlucky just ely. Vaudeville's gone to pieces here, absolutely to pieces. And what th one thing and another, these last few weeks I've just been living om hand to mouth, on little engagements picked up here and there, me of it damned near to busking. If it was summer, I wouldn't mind, t winter—you know what it is. You want a cast-iron contract in win- r. I tell you, things have been so bad, I've even considered band work, ut I couldn't get near, couldn't get near. The Union, you know—ey've a union and it won't let an outsider come within a mile. Then thought of concert party work, pierrot stuff. It's a hell of a drop, course. Mind you, I won't say I've never done it before. I've even one the black-faced business, though that was in the days when it still ad style."

"But these concert parties or pierrots or whatever they call themselves, on't they just go round, hopping from pier to pier, so to speak, in ummer? Won't they all have just finished?" And it struck Inigo that e had not seen any of these troupes for years. Did the men still bend heir knees in an idiotic way when they sang choruses? What a life!

"Most of them have finished now, but some keep on through the inter, doing small inland towns, you know, where people are glad o see anybody."

"They must be," said Inigo, who was still turning over his memories.

"Well, I'll tell you what I'm going to do, and I want you to listen very carefully, my boy. I'm going to see a concert party tomorr And I'll tell you why. I ran across two people I know—decent r folks, man and wife, vocalists, but not, I think, absolutely bursting w talent—and they told me they were in a troupe that was running through the winter and there might be a vacancy or two in the autu I saw a notice in *The Stage* saying they were at Rawsley for two we that's not too far from here, and so tomorrow I'm running over have a look at 'em. Now if you're doing nothing—but, look h what *are* you doing?"

Inigo gave a brief but spirited sketch of his own position.

"If you do anything but play the piano," said Mr. Mitcham earnes "you're just throwing yourself away. I was watching your work night, and I said to myself 'That boy was born with it. A bit experience, a few tips from an old hand, and he can go anywhe And, believe me, I *know*. I've seen and heard thousands."

Inigo laughed. "Did you like my tunes?"

"Catchy stuff, very catchy stuff, and new to me. Where did y pick 'em up?"

"Out of the ether."

"Ah, I never bother with this wireless myself," said Mr. Mitch judiciously, "but I've no doubt you can pick up a good tune or t occasionally if you listen long enough."

"No, no, I don't mean that. I mean, they're my own tunes. I ma 'em up myself."

Mr. Mitcham stared at him. Then he extended a long yellow har "Shake that," he commanded, "and as hard as you like. Now y listen to me. There's a pot of money in those tunes if they're prope handled. You've got the gift, though, mind you, I don't say you do need experience or a little advice from people who've had experien After this, I can't let you go, I just can't. It would be a crime. You' just got to stick to the old man, my boy. Come with me tomorro If there's an opening for me, there'll have to be one for you too. there isn't, we can move on. We'll try that stuff out somewher

Inigo had come to the conclusion that it really would be rather lark. "But what do they call this pierrot troupe?" he asked.

"I'll tell you in a minute," replied the other. He fumbled in h istcoat pocket and finally produced a little newspaper cutting. "Here s. They call themselves 'The Dinky Doos.'"

nigo gave a yell. "But I couldn't be a Dinky Doo," he gasped. on't ask me to be a Dinky Doo."

Ir. Mitcham lowered his great eyebrows. "What's the matter? Do u know the show?"

No, but the name, the name! It would hurt, absolutely."

No, a mere nothing, that!" Mr. Mitcham's face cleared, and it was if the sun had risen upon those black hills of South Dakota he l once mentioned. He stood up, then patted Inigo on the shoulder. I don't mind the name, you shouldn't. At your age, my dear boy, doesn't matter what they call you or make you wear; you can get ay with it. But look at me, at my age! I ask you, do I look like a nky Doo?"

He looked fantastic enough for anything, Inigo thought. All that said, however, was that they might put it to the waitress, who was proaching with the bill. "Now would you say," Inigo solemnly enired of her, "that either of us looked like a Dinky Doo?"

Get on with you!" said the waitress, who understood this to be ne sort of chaff but was too sleepy to bother her head about it.

'And that's the answer all right," said Mr. Mitcham as they walked wn the stairs. "Get on with it. I'll look you up in the morning. here are you staying?"

And in the morning, quite early, Mr. Mitcham arrived at Inigo's tel, accompanied by his banjo-case and his large and disreputable bag. e did not say where he had been sleeping, and had the appearance not having slept anywhere except in his check suit. Two little cross-untry trains finally landed them in Rawsley, and in the early afternoon ey walked past those Station Refreshment Rooms to which, later, they d to return. Mr. Mitcham did not know where his acquaintances, hose name was Brundit, were staying, in the town, and it took some ne to find their lodgings. Inigo did not see how it was to be done all, but Mr. Mitcham, pointing out once more that he was an old nd, declared that everybody in these small towns knew everybody se's business and succeeded in uncovering a trail that brought them last to the temporary home of the Brundits. There, a little woman

with five curling-pins stuck round her furrowed forehead gave t
cheerless news. The "Dinky Doos" were no more.

"And I'm sure I'm right sorry for them. Mr. and Mrs. Brundit,
Very nice people, and them with a little boy of their own," said
bepinned landlady breathlessly. "Off he goes on Sunday, this c
that's running it all, and the young woman that plays the piano
them going with him, and not a penny they've had for weeks. A
people in the town's saying all sorts of things about them—and of co
you do want your money, don't you, especially these days, when ev
thing's top price—but as I say, and I'm as much out as anybody, I
right sorry for them, and didn't know where to look when they ca
and told me, and Mrs. Brundit, such a dignified and lady-like pers
not like some of them, crying the eyes out of her. And now they
gone down to the station to see about something, and they told
they'd be all having a cup of tea and bit of a meeting down at M
Mounder's—that's the Station Refreshment Rooms, a tin place, just
posite—and that's where you're likely to find them, if you ask me."

That is how they came to be at the Station Refreshment Rooms,
tering them—or rather it—for there was only one large public ro
in the hut—at the same time as a slender fair woman and her surprisi
companion, a short but sturdy man who looked like a workman
some kind or other. The four of them seemed to Inigo to make a v
odd quartette indeed.

There were only six people in the tea-room, and they were all sitti
together at the far end. Obviously these were the forlorn entertain
though they did not sound very forlorn, for they all seemed to be ta
ing at the top of their voices and laughing a great deal. Mr. Mitch
marched up the room to them, and he was followed by the fair wom
who had just come out of the car. Inigo, for once unaccountably sh
hesitated, took off his knapsack, then stopped where he was. He turn
to find that the little man who looked like a workman had also stopp
Their eyes met. Inigo raised his eyebrows and gave a little grin. T
other replied with a wink.

"Are these here," he began, in a kind of hearty whisper, "the thin
umjybobs—*pier-rots?*"

"They are," replied Inigo. "They call themselves the Dinky Doos

Eh, they get some daft names!" Then he added ruminatively: "I w nowt about a Dinky Doo, but it seems to be a queer do all right. it's been nowt but a queer do all t'week wi' me."

nigo was amused by his impressive tones and broad accent and earnest n face. "Oh, how's that?" he asked.

It began o' Monday night, when you were i' bed and fast asleep, ——"

Half a minute, my dear sir, half a minute! Let me tell you," said go, with mock solemnity, "I was not in bed and fast asleep on Mon- night. I never saw a bed that night——"

Ner more did I. Nobbut a sofa."

I was in the waiting room of a God-forsaken place called Dulling- n Junction, listening to my friend over there playing his banjo. hat do you think about that?"

I nivver knew there were so many folk wandering about. Once u've fairly set off, you come on 'em all over t'place. Do you know ere I was o' Monday night?"

'I give it up."

'On a lorry wi' two o' t'biggest rogues you ivver clapped eyes on, com- g down t'Great North Road." And Mr. Oakroyd's blue eyes fairly one with pride. This time he had a listener worthy of him.

"That's the stuff, absolutely the stuff!" cried Inigo, beaming upon s droll little Yorkshireman, who was evidently a Romantic like him- f. Then he looked down the room, to see Mr. Morton Mitcham ckoning him with waves of his gigantic arm.

At that moment a voice came ringing from the centre of the group. Come on, you two," it cried. "Don't be shy. Hurry up and join in." was a girl's voice, casual but a trifle mocking. Inigo heard it with curious little thrill of excitement that afterwards he was at great ins to explain. He has not forgotten it yet, and perhaps he never ill. It came ringing—and up went a curtain.

"Nowt shy about yon lass," said Mr. Oakroyd. "Well, we've come fair way, we mun join in."

And that will do very well for the last word now. It is the tag of the rst higgledy-piggledy piece, with its glimpses of too familiar back-

grounds, scenes that are undoubtedly set scenes, and of roads jog
invitingly out of them, with its scattered hints of discontent and
bellion and escape. Here they all are, our people, and for a little s
we darken the stage that holds them, leaving them staring at
another.

: BOOK TWO :

Chapter One

N WHICH THEY ALL BECOME "GOOD COMPANIONS"

I

HAME isn't the word for it, it isn't really, Miss Trant," cried Miss Elsie Longstaff indignantly. "I've been in work now since last il, five months and more, consecutive, and look at the position I'm in —having to get a sub from home! In work since last April, Miss nt, and haven't been able to have my hair waved for three weeks! l this last week, my dear! The suspicion, the looks, the tone of voice, things we've had to put up with all through that dirty rotter! It's ed."

t's the wickedest thing I ever heard of," replied Miss Trant warmly. really had begun to feel angry with this defaulting manager. "Have her cup of tea?"

es, thanks, I will." Then, with a dramatic change of tone, Miss gstaff went on: "He got us to sign on right through till next sum- It looked a good contract. What was the result? I'd a nice panto- e offer, came in early—Dandini for seven weeks, opening at dlesbrough—and of course I went and turned it down—flat. And look at me!"

iss Trant did, very sympathetically. Elsie was younger and prettier her sister Effie, though neither so young nor so pretty as she ap- ed to be at a first glance. She was probably about thirty, a too de- inedly golden blonde, with large blue eyes set wide apart, a face narrowed sharply to a small pointed chin, and a discontented mouth. looked like a knowing and slightly dishevelled doll.

nd apart from that," Miss Longstaff added, rather tearfully, "he's and broken up one of the best little shows on the road."

really was a good pierrot troupe, was it?"

lease don't say 'pierrot troupe,' Miss Trant. It makes me think of being on the sands and rattling a box round the crowd. Call i 'concert party.' "

"I'm sorry. Concert party, then."

"Well, honestly, Miss Trant, it was a *good show.* Don't go and th I say that because I was in it. That's nothing. I've been in shows, dear, that I'd tell you frankly were dead rotten. I wouldn't want body who knew me, or anybody who appreciated my work, to see s of the shows I've been in. But this was *good.* With any luck, we c have coined money with it."

"What a shame!" cried Miss Trant, and then looked thoughtful. haps it was at this moment that a certain crazy notion began bobbin and out of her head.

"Yes, but what's so aggravating, so fearfully maddening, my d cried Miss Longstaff excitedly, "is that it's a better show still, now t two are out of it, or anyhow it's got the makings of a better show."

"Weren't they good?"

"Duds, complete and unutterable duds. He did monologues and c impersonations. You never heard anything like it. He never got a h Mr. Charles Mildenhall in his celebrated monologues and child im sonations! My dear, it was a *scream.* They used to think it was a until he went on and on. As for that precious pianist he took with him—Marjorie Maidstone, she called herself, after the jail, I pose—she was easily the world's worst as a pianist. She daren't looked Little Nelly's Instruction Book in the face. Thumping away those big fat fingers of hers, playing slow when you wanted it fast, fast when you wanted it slow, missing the repeats—oh, ghastly! I ruined my act once, she ruined it fifty times. With a decent pianis shouldn't know ourselves. And now, because they've gone and don dirty on us, the show's finished. Isn't it sickening? It makes you heart."

"But can't you run it yourselves?" asked Miss Trant, who, in this mood of hers, was dying to see somebody run something.

"Oh, we've talked and talked and talked, but it's no good. We' money—not a bean. We've four weeks owing as it is, and can't for our digs here, most of us, let alone pay off for the show. Th taken all our props at the hall here, to pay the rent. It's wicked.

me see Mr. Dirty Charles Mildenhall. Just let me set eyes on him in, and will there be trouble? Oh won't there just! Child Imperson- ! Can you beat it!" And Miss Longstaff gave three dabs at her t eye before drinking her tea.

fiss Trant, after glancing round the curious assembled company, be- to question her companion about these debts, and Miss Longstaff ied languidly and with many a despairing sniff. Oh yes, if all that paid off and there was some money left to pay immediate expenses, show could go on. And if there was enough money behind to rent Majesty's Theatre, it could go on better still. It amounted to *that*. at a hope!" she concluded bitterly, and evidently felt that all this was merely turning the knife in the wound.

Vell, I don't know——" Miss Trant hesitated. That crazy little on was bobbing furiously now. She made an effort to pretend it not there.

iss Longstaff stared at her with widening eyes. Then she leaned ard, all eagerness now. "Look here, Miss Trant, you don't happen now anybody who could put the money up, do you? I can tell this, honestly, there isn't a more promising little show anywhere. any luck at all, it could have been an absolute riot. I'm sure do know of somebody, don't you?"

stead of making a direct reply to this, Miss Trant hesitated again, finally murmured: "I wonder how much money it would take ean paying all there is to pay already, and then carrying on." Her trailed away into a speculative silence, broken at last by the voice mmon sense, pointing out that she was a fool. But then, wasn't it time she was a fool? You can't go on being cool and sensible e time, for ever.

ss Longstaff leaned forward again and whispered: "Jimmy Nunn tell you—he's been working it out, I know, because he's tried to get somebody to back us. He's our comedian—that's him, there—and he's one of the best comedians going in Concert Party —clever, and keeps it clean—and he's stiff with experience, knows from A to Z. You have a talk to Jimmy about it, Miss Trant. ring him over." And she slipped away to whisper to a queer- g man in a brown tweed suit.

Miss Trant had never met a comedian before, and it seemed credible that she should be meeting one now. If Mr. Jimmy Nunn h walked across to sing a song or crack a joke or two to her, she wo not have been surprised; but that Mr. Jimmy Nunn should mer announce, in a rather husky voice, that he was very pleased to meet and then quietly sit down, was astonishing. Nevertheless, there something distinctly droll about Mr. Nunn. His manner was gr and dignified, almost pompous, but he had obviously spent so m of his time being a funny man that this other manner sat unea upon him, so that by merely refraining from singing songs and cra ing jokes, by talking quite seriously, he seemed to be playing a p thus remaining a droll fellow in spite of himself. Miss Trant fou his appearance quite fascinating. He was really of medium height had the body of a large stout man and the legs of a short man; he a bald patch in front and grey stubble of hair surrounding it, li eyes set too close together, a shining bulbous nose, and an extraordin expanse of upper lip enclosed between two deep wrinkles; and his wh face had a curious air of being a mask that had been painted and rub and painted again times without number.

"Not in the profession yourself, Miss Trant?" he enquired, clos one eye and staring hard with the other. "No? I thought not, tho I used to know a Mrs. Trant on the Macnaghten Circuit. No, wrong; I'm lying. It was Brant. Brant's Merry Chicks—juveniles, know—none of 'em over thirty. You're not in management by chance?"

"I've never managed anything except a house," said Miss Trant.

"If you can do that as it ought to be done," Mr. Nunn observed, some solemnity, "and take it easy, keep smilin', have a good word one and all, then—I say—you couldn't do better. Isn't that so? Rig He waved the whole matter aside. Then, lowering his voice a li he went on: "You were asking something about the show, what w down the river for, what it would take to run it. Am I right?"

Miss Trant wanted to laugh, for though Mr. Nunn's manner quite pompous, it kept breaking down, and all the time he gave her drollest looks out of the particular eye that happened to be open. "W she faltered, "I was just—wondering——"

"Quite right!" said Mr. Nunn, and produced from his inside pocket a eap and very soiled notebook. "I've got figures in this," he announced oudly. "It's here—most of it anyhow—in black-*and*-white."

"That's the stuff, Jimmy," said Miss Longstaff brightly.

"Just you run away and play, Elsie," Mr. Nunn commanded; and after aking a little face at him and flashing a professional smile at Miss ant, Elsie did go, joining the others, who had now formed one group a neighbouring table.

'A good girl," remarked Mr. Nunn; "looks well and not as afraid of rk as some of 'em; but——" and here he lowered his voice and leaned ward—"can't quite put it all over yet, hasn't just got—y'know——"

Miss Trant nodded and really felt she did know. "I wish," she said tly, "you would tell me about the people in this trou—party—w." She almost felt herself blushing as she brought out this last rd. It sounded so knowing and professional. "You've had a lot of erience, haven't you, Mr. Nunn?"

That's right. A lot of experience. C. P. work, halls, panto, low nedy in legit., know it all. And, mind you, whatever I may say about se boys and girls, I'll say this, as a show—or what might be a show t was pulled together now—it's *good.*" He found a cutting in the ebook and handed it over. "Here's one of our adverts. They're usu- all lies, but this one's the solid truth."

he advertisement, which was from *The Stage,* ran as follows:

Wanted Known
Offers from Sept. 3 onward
THE DINKY DOOS

in a Non-Stop Programme of Clever Comedy and Exquisite Vocalism. Played to enormous business at Little Sandmouth, last. Many thanks T. Browning, Esq., for hearty welcome, and Mrs. James, G. Hudson, Esq., and R. A. Mercer, Esq., for enquiries. Refer. Refer. Refer. Next, Pav. Shingleton.

Trant read it through once, wrinkled her forehead, then read it n.

"Wrote that myself," Mr. Nunn remarked, not without pride. "Alw wrote the adverts for Mildenhall. Neat and effective, don't you think

"Yes, I should think so. But, tell me, what does 'Wanted Kno mean?" she enquired. "Why 'Known'?"

"Oh, I always put that in. And, of course, 'Known'—well, you se it's *'Known'*—isn't it, you see?"

This was not very clear to Miss Trant, but she said she suppose was. And after that, she thought, it would not do to ask what "Ref meant, nor even to hint that it must be difficult to play to "enorm business" in a place called Little Sandmouth, of which she had ne heard before. "But you were going to tell me something about people here." She dropped her voice. "Who is that very tall, thin in the loud, check suit?"

Mr. Nunn glanced across, then shook his head. "Not one of us," whispered. "I've just been introjuced to him. Name of Mitcham. pro. Banjo-player."

"I remember. He came in when I did, with that rather pleas looking, untidy youth with the lock of hair."

"That is so," said Mr. Nunn. "Not our lot at all, just visiting. you see that other boy who's talking to 'em, that nice-looking on Miss Trant did see him, and had indeed been thinking for some t that he was an astonishingly handsome youth. He had a small h carefully waved dark hair, and fine regular features, and was beautif dressed. It was a pleasure to look at him, though Miss Trant deci she had no particular desire to know him. He was not the typ young man she admired. "That's Jerry Jerningham, our light come and dancer," Mr. Nunn continued. "And I don't mind telling he's a *find*. Works hard, got personality, puts it over all the time. couldn't want a better dancer. If he plays his cards properly, he'l up in the West End before long. They've only got to *see* him. only thing is, he won't feed. I never struck a worse feed." And Nunn paused impressively.

Miss Trant stared. This seemed a curious complaint to make. you mean that he won't eat?"

Mr. Nunn leaned back, banged his thigh, and gave a sudden gu Then he looked grave again. "Not at all. It doesn't mean eating.

that goes, there's only one member of this show that can't eat, and it's me. Got a wicked stomach—oh, downright wicked!—won't look a thing. Bacon, eggs, ham, chops, steak and chips, bit o' pie—any- ng you really fancy, y'know—you wouldn't believe what they are me. Poison, that's what they are. Give me a good supper," he pur- ed earnestly, "and you might as well fill me up with red-hot pins and edles. I haven't had a square meal for three years, just toast and rcoal-biscuits and beef-tea and bits of fish and chicken and jellies and pes. And I've got to be funny on that, got to make a lot o' people gh who are filled up with roast beef and Yorkshire and baked pota- s and greens and apple pie. Dear, dear, dear!"

Ie wagged his head so comically that Miss Trant had to laugh even ile she was crying "What a shame!"

But this feeding I'm talking about," Mr. Nunn went on, "is a name the profession for working up to gags. The chap that feeds has to the comedian questions and get angry with him and all that. You w the business."

es, Miss Trant did know it.

And I give you *my* word, Miss Trant, it's not so easy as it looks, a comedian's got to have a good feeder. Now young Jerningham e hates it and so can't feed for nuts. That's good, isn't it?—can't l for nuts. And properly speaking, it's his job to feed, but as luck have it, Joe over there—he's our baritone, Courtney Brundit, but ybody calls him Joe—is as good a feed as you could wish for." He cated a powerfully built man, with a broad and pleasantly stupid , who was smoking a short pipe and staring at nothing. "I won't I've not heard better baritone singers than Joe. I've heard a lot er, and so have you. But if you or anybody else told me you wanted n this show and leave Joe out, I'd say 'Well, you can leave me out That's how I feel about Joe. He's not one of the brainy ones, isn't, and you'll never hear him at Covent Garden, but he's got a t of gold. You can't rile him, and he'll do anything for a pal, Joe Easiest-tempered man I ever knew, and a good job too because as strong as a horse. He was in the Navy one time and a heavy- ht champion. If you ask me, that's what started him off as a singer. wanted to sing, he sang, and nobody could tell him to shut up."

Mr. Nunn chuckled a little over this, then drew a long breath and came serious again.

“That’s his wife there, our contralto,” he began.

“What, the woman in the purple hat?” It was a peculiarly revol purple hat and Miss Trant had been shuddering at it for some ti It completely dominated its wearer, a vague plumpish sort of wor who was knitting in a rather detached and stately manner.

“That’s the one. Stella Cavendish she calls herself, but she’s M Joe Brundit. Big voice, a good classy rep, plenty of experience, an real nice woman, though a bit inclined to put it on, y’know, now again. Keeps Joe well in hand. But they’re a nice couple to work w They’ve got a little boy called George—lives with his aunt in Denm Hill—and you’d think there’d never been another kid in the wo But it’s hard on them, this bust-up, I can tell you.”

“And who is that young dark girl who’s got such a merry face like the look of her.” The girl in question was listening to Mr. O royd, who appeared to be telling her all about his adventures.

“Ah, I was coming to her.” Mr. Nunn’s face brightened at o “That’s Susie—Miss Susie Dean—our comeedeeyen and the baby of show. I knew her father and mother—both pros—dead now. T little girl’s got it in her blood, absolutely born for it.”

“Do you mean that she’s very good?” asked Miss Trant, who interested.

“Good! She’s a wonder. Mind you, she’s young, and I don’t say nothing to learn, but she’s picking it up like greased lightnin’—b ever week. There’ll be no stopping Susie once she’s got a toe on ladder. If we don’t see her name in electric lights in Shaftesbury A nue before we’re ten years older, I’ll eat—I’ll never touch another b of magnesia!”

“I’d like to see her on the stage,” said Miss Trant, glancing acro the piquant little dark face. “She looks interesting—comical and cl How old is she?”

“Twenty. And you can take it from me, my—Miss Trant, I me she *is* comical and clever. She’s all over this show. The way she get laughs! You’ve only got to let her sniff an audience—if it’s onl free passes in four rows of chairs—and she’s bubbling over. A l nedians wouldn't have stood for the way she gets laughs, I can tell u—lot of jealousy in the profession, Miss Trant; it's the curse of it ut I don't mind, bless her! Susie and me's the best of pals." He ked across at the girl as he spoke, his queer lined face alight with ection; and Miss Trant, following his glance, saw the girl look up and w a kiss to him. Miss Trant smiled, rather wistfully.

If this show had gone as it ought," Mr. Nunn continued dejectedly, e'd have had a big chance. Somebody'd have seen her and snapped up. Now she'll have to take what comes, and ten to one be jumped because she's too good for the bit of business they'll tell her to do. 's taken it well, best of the lot, Susie has, kept her spirits up all the e, but it's rotten hard lines. And I'll tell you this, Miss Trant," he very impressive now, "I blame myself for this."

Why surely not!" cried Miss Trant. "I don't see how it could be r fault."

I don't suppose you do, but nevertheless you can take it from me it *is* fault," he replied, gloomily triumphant. "Who's had most experi- e here? I have. I ought to have known. Who'd heard one or two er things about Charlie Mildenhall? I had. I ought to have known. o looked at the bookings and saw he'd gone and fixed up rentals it and left? I did. I ought to have known." He looked at her with air of one who has made everything plain.

'm afraid I don't understand." Miss Trant looked apologetic. hat are rentals?"

Ah, you see, it's like this. As a rule a Concert Party works on a entage basis. It gets—we'll say—sixty per cent of the gross takings, the people who own the pavilion or hall or theatre or whatever it is the other forty. Sometimes there's a guarantee—for thirty or forty nds maybe—which means——"

That your share will amount to at least the thirty or forty pounds," in Miss Trant, who was no fonder of being a pupil than the next on.

Right! Well, that's fair enough, gives everybody a chance. But we 't like renting places in the C. P. world, I can tell you, and that's t I mean by rentals. You just pay out your money and the people 's running the hall or pavilion don't care tuppence about your show so long as they get their money. This was a rental here in Rawsle and half of 'em was rentals, like this. I did point it out at the ti Five-and-twenty pounds! And you oughter see the place! Not wo five-and-twenty shillings! And he hadn't just taken it for one week, h taken it for two. Two at five-and-twenty a week, here, in this pla I ought to have known. And he showed me his dates for the autu and half of 'em was rentals, like this. I did point it out at the ti but I ought to have known. He never meant to stay, not him. Di matter to him if it was twenty-five hundred pounds a week here wasn't going to pay it, and he knew it—oh yes, he knew all right!" Nunn raised his voice. "They've got every prop we have, and there t stop till we can pay the fifty pounds, so we've said good-bye to ' We've not had a treasury for four weeks."

"Yes, Miss Longstaff told me."

"Mr. Jimmy Mug, that's me! I could kick myself from here to dirty Assembly Rooms and back, every time I think of it." He was v excited now. "A man of my experience! And seeing those dates t I tell you, Miss What's-it, I can't look these boys and girls in the f I give you my word I can't." He gave a groan.

"There's Jimmy going on again," said a voice.

"Now then, Jimmy, now then!" This was from Mr. Court Brundit, otherwise Joe, who now came lumbering across to them. "D you take any notice of him, ma'm," he said to Miss Trant, and he g Mr. Nunn a tremendous slap on the back.

"Hoi!" cried Mr. Nunn. "Steady, Joe, steady! You've got a hand a sledge-hammer. Miss—er—Trant, this is Mr. Brundit, Courtney the stage, and Joe off."

"Very pleased to meet you, Miss Trant," said Mr. Brundit, taking hand in his huge fist and shaking it heartily. "Now don't you Jimmy start blaming himself," he added in his slow good-humo growl, "because it's no more his fault than it's my fault or anybody e fault."

"That's all right, Joe, but——"

"But nothing, Jimmy! We can't have a chap with a stomach yours—he's got an awful bad stomach, Miss—worst in the professi ing and upsetting himself for nothing. Here, you people," he roared, e're not blaming Jimmy, are we?"

'No," they chorused, to Miss Trant's astonishment.

'Who's been keeping our hearts up?" roared Joe again.

'Jimmy!" they cried.

Good old Jimmy!" Joe prompted them.

Good old Jimmy!" they all cried. Even Mr. Oakroyd, who was not man to be left out of anything so hearty and friendly, came in at the l with "Ay, good owd Jimmy!"

Then before Jimmy or Joe or anyone else could make another sound, y found themselves confronted by the proprietor of these Station reshment Rooms, Mrs. Mounder, who stood there, terribly comssed now in face and arms and body, all erect and folded up, but h a head trembling with indignation.

I can't do with yer," Mrs. Mounder was crying. "Not another minute! tside, every one."

Now then, ma," began Joe.

Irs. Mounder glared at him. "One-and-fourpence and one-and-eightce and two shillings, that's what one or other of yer owes me, and can pay me now, at once, and take yerselves somewhere else, sitting ut and making yer commotion!" And from the torrent of speech t followed, they were at liberty to gather that she never, never did, ldn't keep a door open, couldn't do with them, and would show them ible if it was trouble they were asking for. By this time she had ied herself into such a rage that she made a mistake in her tactics. singled out Miss Trant, crying: "You too, Miss! I thought you different, a lady, but seemingly you're another of 'em."

What!" cried Miss Trant.

You 'eard what I said."

Iiss Trant rose from her chair, drew herself up to her full height, marched towards Mrs. Mounder as steadily as the old Colonel and other fighting Trants had marched upon earthworks and counterps. She was pale and there was a kind of glitter in her fine clear eyes, there was not the ghost of a tremble or a waver or a wobble.

What did you say we owed you?" she demanded icily.

t this there was some expostulation from the company behind, but she turned round quickly and even held up a hand: "One mome please. I'll explain later." Then there was not a whisper among the

She faced Mrs. Mounder again, looking her straight in the eyes. M Mounder tried to compress herself into a yet smaller, tighter, har mass of disapproval, and when she discovered it could not be done, s began to weaken. After a sniff or two, she replied: "There's one-ar fourpence and one-and-eightpence and two shillings altogether owi though, upon my word, what with the hot water that's been call for ——"

Miss Trant cut her short. She took out a ten-shilling note and ligh tossed it towards the woman. "There you are," she said, raising her c another inch, "and please bring me the change at once."

The note had fallen on to the floor, and Mrs. Mounder looked at now, with her head trembling away. Miss Trant neither spoke r moved, and the others at the back never made a sound. Then M Mounder suddenly dipped, took the note, muttered something that body could catch, and hurried out.

Miss Trant turned round, quite slowly this time, quite calmly, smi vaguely at everybody, and said "Let's go now, shall we?" And off went to the door, to receive her change and to give Mrs. Mounder a l annihilating lift of eyebrow, while the others, bursting into talk ag came trooping after her. Between the doorway and the road, where t had met before, the untidy youth with the lock of hair caught up to and introduced himself as Inigo Jollifant. "That was magnificent, al lutely," he remarked. "But you paid for my tea, you know."

"I was going to explain to everybody why I did that," said Miss Tr Then she hesitated.

"The gesture, of course, the gesture asked for it," said Inigo sy pathetically. "One-and-fourpence here, one-and-eightpence there— gesture! Pay for the lot—take that and get out—the only way to do As a matter of fact, I was thinking of that myself. But I haven't style, you know."

Miss Trant—who suddenly felt light-hearted, free, gay—laug "This is my car. We'll stop here and wait for the others. The poin though," she went on hastily, "I've suddenly decided to—to run troupe—I mean concert party. That horrid woman decided me."

"Splendid, absolutely!" cried Inigo enthusiastically. "I was only wish-ng I could do it. But I've only got forty pounds to spare. I've told hem, though, I was ready to join up—just for a lark, you know. I've een teaching in a prep school, but I can play the piano, and from what can gather, my sort of piano stuff is just what they want."

"I wish you would," said Miss Trant. "I'd been wondering about it or the last half-hour and trying to find out things, and then when that oman talked like that, I suddenly thought 'All right then, I *will.*' I on't know anything about it, so nothing could be more crazy."

"Oh, hatter-mad, I agree," said Inigo cheerfully. "But a lark of colossal imensions. And here we all are, rogues and vagabonds together."

"I'm wondering now what we ought to do," said Miss Trant, quickly, s the others came up.

"I know. Leave it to me." Inigo turned to face the entertainers, and alled out: "I say, is there a place here where we might all have some upper and a sort of meeting?"

"Why, what's the idea, Jollifant?" This was from Mr. Morton Mitcham.

"The idea is, I want everybody to have supper or dinner or whatever hey decide to call it, with me tonight," Inigo explained. "You see——" and he glanced at Miss Trant.

"The fact is," said Miss Trant, rather shy again now, "I'm rather think-ng of—of running—the—the show. That is, if you'll let me," she added astily.

There was an excited cry from everybody, but Miss Susie Dean was rst. "You darling!" she flashed out, and then added, when the others ad done: "I don't know you, but I'm sure you are." And everybody aughed at this, and Miss Trant blushed and shook her head.

"Now about this supper then?" said Inigo, after the excitement had ied down.

"What about that hotel in the market-place, Jimmy?" asked Mr. Brundit. "They'd do it. Might be a bit dearish, though."

"Never mind about that," cried Inigo, who guessed that his own ideas f expense might be different from the homely Mr. Brundit's. "What s the place? Would it do?" He turned to Mr. Nunn.

"You mean The Royal Standard, don't you, Joe?" said Mr. Nunn.

"Yes, they'd do it all right. Good room upstairs too, they tell m Though if there's a man on this earth who'd make a worse show at supper or dinner or anything where there's real eating than me, I'd lik to meet him. You know, it's all poison to me, Mr. What's-it," he sai to Inigo earnestly.

"Shame! Well, then," cried Inigo, "let's say half-past seven at Th Royal Standard, everybody! I'll go and fix it up. That's all right, isn it, Miss Trant?"

Then the newcomers remembered they had rooms to find, and the was some excited talk about this. Finally, Inigo and Mr. Morto Mitcham departed with the Brundits, who thought there would be roo for one of them in their own lodgings and a place for the other ne door. They were accompanied by Messrs. Nunn and Jerningham. Mi Trant, having Elsie's hamper in the car, suggested that Elsie herse should come in too, and as Miss Susie Dean shared lodgings with Elsi it was agreed that she should join them, whereupon Miss Susie scrambl in at the back, which was rather full of things, with the remark that would do Rawsley good to see her there. So that was settled.

"Well, Miss," said a voice, gruff but diffident, perhaps a trifle wistf "I'd better have them traps o' mine out o't'car and be getting on like

"Oh, Mr. Oakroyd!" cried Miss Trant, who had forgotten all abo him. "Where are you going?"

"Nay, I don't know fairly."

"He doesn't know where he's going," cried Miss Susie Dean excited "He told me in there. Oh, he mustn't go, must he, Miss Trant?"

"Of course you mustn't go, Mr. Oakroyd. You don't want to go, you?"

"Well"—Mr. Oakroyd rubbed his chin reflectively—"I don't say I' owt on, as you might say. But I'm nobbut i' t'road here. You can't wi' me."

"I'm sure we can," said Miss Trant. "I'm sure there's something you to do. Isn't there, Miss Longstaff? Isn't there, Miss Dean?"

"I'm sure I don't know really," began Miss Longstaff, who was n interested in Mr. Oakroyd and was surprised that a lady like Miss Tra should be.

"Of course there is," put in Miss Dean, who had heard already abo

Great North Road and Lily and all manner of things. "And he
ust come to supper, mustn't he? If he doesn't, I shan't. We'll stand
tside making noises. We'll throw things at the window."

"Hurry up and get in, Mr. Oakroyd, if you can find room," Miss
ant commanded, and without another word Mr. Oakroyd did get in,
d, after a struggle with the hamper and various bags, in which he
as assisted energetically by Miss Dean, he did find room.

"Well," he said, his honest broad face alight as they moved down the
ad, "this *is* a do, this is." He ruminated for a minute or two, then,
tching some droll glances that his companion shot at him out of her
ely dark eyes, he grinned afresh and banged his right fist into his
t palm several times. "This caps t'lot, this does."

"Tha's reight, lad," said Miss Dean coolly.

"Yond's a caution," Mr. Oakroyd told himself. Then he looked at
wsley with the air of a man who has seen many other and better
aces.

II

half-past seven that night, all our friends were assembled in the
stairs dining-room of The Royal Standard—with one exception. Miss
ant was not there. The Misses Dean and Longstaff, on being ques-
ned, said they did not know why she was late. They had found very
ce rooms for her next door but one to their own, and had left her
ere. She had, however, said something about a bath—"and you know
hat that means in these digs, my dear." Their various dears did know
hat it meant, and were relieved. "Though it wouldn't surprise *me*
something had happened to her, taken ill or lost her memory or all
r money or something, right at the very crucial moment. That's the
rt of thing that *would* happen, my dear." This was the dark verdict
Miss Stella Cavendish, otherwise Mrs. Joe Brundit, who was looking
ry festive and important and uncomfortable in her cerise, a dress that
as rather too small for her now but had done good service some years
o during a season in "stock," when she had played the Duchess of
orking and other great-lady parts, all with a song in the third act.
ut if Mrs. Joe, who had no illusions about the profession and was a
eat authority upon its ups-and-downs, especially the downs, was ready

to be pessimistic about the non-appearance of their possible saviour, Mi Trant, this does not mean that she was out of tune with the festive ev ning. The Duchess of Dorking herself could not have surveyed an approved of the arrangements in better style. She hastened to co gratulate her host, Mr. Jollifant: "Everything very nice, very tastefu I'm sure," was her verdict.

"Mrs. Tidby—she's the proprietor—said the notice was too short replied Inigo, "but that she'd do her best. And, she said, although sh was not the one to say it, nobody in this town could do better. An she insisted upon telling me all about the annual dinner of the Rawsl and West Something-or-other Horticultural Society, which has been hel here since 1898. So there!"

"All very nice, very tasteful," repeated Mrs. Joe, with bland com placency, casting her eye over the table, laid for ten. "Though nobo knows better than I do," she continued archly, "that so much depen on the orderer in these affairs. Get a good orderer and what happens Everything tasteful, nothing tawdry. How many can you trust to order Now there's Mr. Brundit—Joe—he couldn't order, not to be satisfactor He hasn't the manner. Joe's as gentle as a lamb and as strong as lion, but he hasn't the manner. They'd say in a minute 'Anything'll for *him*.' They *know,* these people, Mr. Jollifant. Now you're a gent man. What does that mean? It means that it comes to you naturall you're a born orderer."

"Oh, I don't know about that," Inigo protested, being the last pers in the world to have any aristocratic pretensions. "I don't know th you can say that——"

"I do," said Mrs. Joe firmly, holding up her hand. "And when you' been as many years in the profession as I have, you'll know. I can t it in a minute. I said to myself as soon as I met you: 'He's untidy; may not have much money; he's ready for his little joke with everybod but—he's a gentleman.' Oxford or Cambridge or Harrow, Mr. Jol fant?"

"Cambridge," said Inigo, staring.

"I knew. 'One of them,' I said to myself." She was very triumpha "There's a *Stamp*. I've thought about it for George—that's our b you know. I said from the first, if that boy's bright—and you could nt a brighter—and if things will allow, he goes to one of those places. on't care, I've told Joe more than once, whether it's Cambridge Col- e or Oxford College—I'm not one of your silly boat-race people—but one of them, things allowing, he goes."

Jolly good!" said Inigo heartily if a trifle absent-mindedly, for he s wondering when Miss Trant would come.

And no stage. I've made up my mind about *that*. Joe says it would nice to have him with us, and nobody knows that better than a ther, but what I say every time is that George must have his chance something gentlemanly—a bank or estate agency. Concert singing ould *not* object to, but that depends on the Voice. So far, George has en no signs of having a Voice. If it comes, well and good. But no ge!"

You're frightening me, Mrs. Brundit," said Inigo, smiling. "Don't get I'm apparently just about to join the profession myself."

Ah, that's your fun, Mr. Jollifant, I know," replied Mrs. Joe, turning head a little to one side and raising her eyebrows. "Just a little erience for you, that's all. I believe you're a real musician."

I'm not," said Inigo, laughing. "Anything but that. I'm just a piano- nder. Writing's the only thing I'm really interested in."

Writing? You have the look of an author too. Now if only I'd had time, the things I could have written! The experience I *have* had, never the time. What is it, Joe?" she enquired, for that gentleman now standing at her elbow.

It's quarter to eight, that's what it is," said Joe rather gloomily. "And s Trant's not here yet. I suppose she wasn't having a game with us, she?"

Oh, she wouldn't do a thing like that, Joe," cried his wife. "You ld see at a glance she wasn't that sort. What I'm wondering is ether anything's happened to her. What if she lost her memory or run over! Just when it seemed all right!"

It'd be just our luck, Mag," said Joe, his face falling. They exchanged ow stares, and for a moment or so Miss Stella Cavendish lost all mblance to the Duchess of Dorking; she seemed to droop, to sag; looked a tired woman who remembered she had a boy to support that he was far away on Denmark Hill, that they had no money and some debts, that jobs were few and getting scarcer; a woman w had said good-bye to the easy elasticity of youth. Joe coughed. "I turn out all right, you'll see," he began gently.

Inigo turned away, for this was no place for him. He wandered rou the room, keeping one eye on the door through which Miss Trant sho enter at any moment. And all his other guests were keeping an eye that door and were beginning to look anxious, though they kept u little buzz of talk and pretended they did not care. Mr. Jimmy Nu had cornered the old waiter in order to tell him that the whole din would be regarded by Mr. Nunn's digestive apparatus as poison a nothing less, and now he had Mrs. Tidby (who had a sister who w just the same) in his audience, and appeared to be presenting the t of them with a little act in which he took the part of a too sensitive a suspicious stomach. But even he watched the door all the time. Jerry Jerningham and Mr. Oakroyd, who had discovered that they co not talk to one another, looked about them and grinned rather vagu but kept most of their glances for the door. Mr. Morton Mitcham, w had unearthed a larger tie and an almost clean collar for the occasi was playing Othello to the combined Desdemona of Miss Longstaff a Miss Dean, but when Inigo approached he broke off to ask the ti "Eight o'clock, is it?" he cried. "Well, well! I just wondered, know." His eye went round to that door and then hastily retrea "Well, as I was saying, Miss Longstaff, Miss Dean, I only once pla Jo'burg in a thunderstorm, a real thunderstorm——"

Inigo began to feel anxious himself now. Suppose Miss Trant re didn't turn up! What a horrible fiasco this supper—as all the pla called it—would be, with the show still in ruins, all their hopes scatt again! He went down the stairs, looked in several of the rooms th then stood at the entrance for a minute or two, glancing up and do the square. When he returned he found the old waiter at the bot of the stairs. "We're still one short," he explained. "Look here, coul you take some cocktails—gin and Italian or sherry and bitters or so thing—upstairs to those people, and ask them to help themselves." had a cocktail himself at the bar, and no sooner had he swallowe than he noticed a figure, an irresolute, hesitating figure, at the entra He rushed forward. It was Miss Trant.

ome along, Miss Trant," he roared. "We're all waiting for you."

'm sorry," she stammered, still hesitating.

e stared curiously at her. What was the matter? "You know," ent on, in a lower voice, "those people upstairs—the poor old Dinky s—had begun to think you weren't turning up, and they were feel- very sick about it. They didn't say anything, which I thought jolly nt of them, but they were beginning to look a bit greenish, abso- y. You can't blame 'em, can you?"

o, of course not," said Miss Trant. "And I'm sorry I've been so . I—er—had to wait ages for a bath."

h, I knew you'd come all right," said Inigo. His tone was cheer- offhand, but he shot another curious glance at her as she came ard. "Baths, of course—well, that's asking for difficulties, isn't it?" abbled, leading her to the stairs. "The old Rawsleyans have not grasped the idea of a bath yet. A panful—yes! Two panfuls— ble! But a bath, involving the contents of more than two pans or kettles and the subsequent immersion of the human body ——"

e stopped him at the foot of the stairs. "Listen, Mr. Jollifant. I I must tell somebody, and I think you'd understand. It's all very of course ——" she hesitated.

o on, Miss Trant," he said. "You must tell me now. As for it's silly—well, we're all a bit silly, aren't we? I know I'm ridiculous, utely."

could have got here earlier," she began hastily, "only I suddenly vered I wanted to—to run away. When I found myself alone again, ndered why I had said I would go into this business. I don't know ing about it. I have some money, but not much really. And then ll so different from the kind of life I have known. And when I ght about all this, I began to feel a bit sick about it and wanted to away, to go back to my own kind of life, you know, to ordinary ortable things ——"

now! I should say I do," cried Inigo softly. "You get a crawly g somewhere at the bottom of your stomach, don't you?—you feel ld and hollow inside—and then you curse yourself for having let elf in for the thing ——"

“That’s it, exactly,” she replied eagerly. “But surely you haven’t like that?”

“Of course I have. This very night, for that matter! I feel like whenever I try anything new, but I say—Down with it! You’d n do anything if you took any notice of that, would you? I mean, all is as strange and absurd and unreal to me as it is to you, really, b don’t care.”

“It’s much worse, I think, for a woman. A young man can do thing for a time, it doesn’t much matter——”

“And so can a woman, within reasonable limits. And this is within ’em, isn’t it?”

“I suppose so,” she replied. “And if it *is* silly, I don’t really m It’s time I did something really silly. It’s terrible being quiet sensible all your life, isn’t it?”

“Rather!” said Inigo, who had never tried it. “And I’m awfully you didn’t run away, you know.”

“And so am I. It was only a bit of me that wanted to, and it w have been mean and cowardly, you know, and I can’t help thinking *had* gone, if I had sneaked back home—and I nearly did—I should hated myself afterwards.” They were climbing the stairs now. glad you understand, Mr. Jollifant.” She drew a long breath, sl herself a little, then laughed. “I feel better now. Thank you.”

“So do I, so don’t thank me. And I’ll do anything I can to hel know nothing about this business, and I’m practically half-witted, e at times on paper—but there!”

They exchanged smiles at the top of the stairs, the smiles of two patriots in a far and fantastic country. They were friends.

Inigo threw open the dining-room door. “Ladies and gentlemen, roared. “Miss Trant.”

A stir, a quick sigh, a buzz of welcome and a clapping of hands; she stood for a moment or two in the doorway, looking at the half embarrassed, half delighted, no longer that familiar and only-t expected figure, Miss Elizabeth Trant, who had stayed at the Old so long that her youth had slipped by and all her bright looks dimmed, but a mysterious Miss Trant who had popped up, come nowhere, to save the show, and whose entrance lit up the room t lit up her face. As she stood there, she felt for a moment that she a vivid and rather delightful person, one that even a busy Scots tor might remember with pleasure. It was a moment well worth the ole six hundred pounds that had fallen to her last week out of the e.

And, if you'll allow me to say so, Miss Trant," said Mrs. Joe, othere Miss Stella Cavendish, sweeping forward impressively, "as pretty entrance as one could wish for. It takes me back in a flash," she the company, "to the big scene in *The Rose of Belgravia*."

Take your seats, ladies and gentlemen," Inigo called out.

Now where are we going to sit, Jollifant?" asked Mr. Morton cham in his most dignified manner. "Quite like old times, Mrs. ndit."

I should say so," cried Miss Susie Dean. "The good old times when all played the baby in *East Lynne*—perhaps. Well, I'm going to sit t to Mr. Oakroyd, because he's shy. Aren't ta, lad?"

Noan too shy to gi' thee a bit of a slap, lass, if tha doesn't behave sen," replied the delighted Mr. Oakroyd in his broadest accent. nd's a coughdrop," he announced to the room at large, and took his e beside her.

Ve have never heard that The Royal Standard in Rawsley is famous its dinners, and as Mrs. Tidby herself pointed out more than once ing the evening, the notice was short, so that it would be absurd to end that the dinner Inigo gave that night was an exquisite and norable repast. Nevertheless, it seemed so to the whole ten of them. re were special reasons why it should. Miss Trant enjoyed it with noticing what she was eating, not because she was not interested in l but simply because she was still excited about herself and everybody . Inigo enjoyed it both as a meal (for his interior still remembered shbury Manor School) and as a lark that would inevitably beget r and wilder larks. Mr. Oakroyd was rather overawed and dubious irst; there were too many knives and forks for his peace of mind; the company of the lively Miss Susie and the sight of a large glass eer helped to reassure him, and soon he happily stared and grinned ate like one who had suddenly found an appetite in fairyland. As Mr. Morton Mitcham and the other players, they enjoyed it because

it was a splendid novelty, eating at that hour, and something o
novelty, perhaps, eating at all, certainly eating steadily through f
generous courses. Miss Susie Dean, who confessed that she had b
living entirely on tea and bread-and-butter and brawn and apples
the past week, declared she had forgotten there was so much food
the world, and was promptly asked not to be vulgar by her collea
Miss Longstaff, who was so determined to be ladylike that she caref
left a little of each course at the side of her plate, which was other
clean enough. Mr. Jerningham contrived to wear an expression of f
boredom throughout the dinner, but despatched it like an elegant w
Mr. Joe Brundit, who joined Mr. Oakroyd in his preference for a l
glass of beer, demanded so many pieces of bread that he became
important figure in the waiter's reminiscences. But it was Mrs. Joe
Mr. Morton Mitcham who succeeded best in giving the dinner the
of being a prodigal feast. With them there seemed to be not four cou
but fifty. The tomato soup, the mysterious little pieces of white f
the boiled mutton, the blackberry and apple tart, were transformed
their histrionic gusto into a banquet of Lucullus, and they seemed
nod and smile at one another over the ruins of garnished peacocks'
nightingales' tongues. To see Mr. Mitcham fill Mrs. Joe's glass and t
his own from the solitary bottle of Beaune was to catch a glimpse of
old mad bad days of the fine ladies and gentlemen who lived careles
the morrow, though the very tumbrils were rattling down the st
When they raised their glasses, the least you saw was a Viceroy
Governor-General of the old school and the Duchess of Dorking.
was a fine performance.

Even Mr. Jimmy Nunn contrived to enjoy the dinner in his own
It was not the soup and fish and toast, to which he restricted him
that he enjoyed, but his abstinence. As he groaned "Can't look at
—poison to me!", he did not seem to be refusing a little mutton
tart, but a gigantic host of dishes; waving away the very fat of the l
He referred to his stomach as if it were a haughty and eccentric g
he had brought with him. He crumbled his toast and sipped his wh
and soda ("Can't touch wine or beer") with a melancholy pride.
found time, however, to talk business with Miss Trant, who explai

efly and rather nervously her complete ignorance and her comparative erty.

If you've two or three hundred you're ready to play with," said Mr. nn, "that'll be more than enough. With any luck, you'll have it k in no time, and after that the profit begins, and you just lean back count the boodle. I don't mind telling you, Miss Trant, if I'd half t, I'd be running the show myself. I wouldn't be sticking to the show didn't believe in it. I'm not like most of these boys and girls here. ould get another engagement—as good as this, if not better—tomor-, 'cos I'm an old hand and well known in the profession. Matter fact, I was getting twice their money, and might have got more if stuck out for it. What are you people eating now? Blackberry pie? word, you don't know your luck. I've nearly forgotten the taste of He sighed hugely.

You're not missing so much, Mr. Nunn," Miss Trant whispered. "It's very nice. The crust's too thick and stodgy."

It looks like Heaven to me," he lamented. "But as I was saying, elieve in the show. We all do, and if we'd had the money, we'd have nted nothing better than to have gone on ourselves, running it on a fit-sharing basis. You see what I mean?"

Yes, of course I do," she exclaimed. "I'm not quite so ignorant as t, you know."

Sorry, sorry! No offence meant, Miss Trant."

And none taken! Isn't that the phrase?" She laughed, then added, ering her voice: "As it is, I have to pay the company's debts——"

You're not forced to," he put in. "You're not responsible for 'em. it 'ud be better if you did. And then we could get all the props k, too."

Certainly. Well, I pay them, and the salaries, of course, and I sup-e the expenses." She was very business-like now, and was enjoying it.

Yes, any expenses that crop up connected with the show," he replied, ch as railway fares, baggage fees, and all that, and anything that's nted for production numbers, special costumes and effects, you know. not costumes for individual numbers. We get them ourselves."

And if there's any profit, it belongs to me?"

Ie groaned. "That is so; but don't put it like that, Miss Trant.

Spare a poor man who's had nothing but toast and mush and a bit fish he's never heard of. Don't think we're going to lose money fo rest of our lives. You make me feel like a Jonah. Put it this way. take *all* the profits."

"That does sound better, doesn't it? And of course I should lil lot of profit, heaps and heaps of money, but somehow I can't bel there will be much."

He looked very solemn and thoughtful, screwing up his face unt seemed all shining nose and upper lip. It was absurd that he sh look like that and yet talk business so sensibly. "I'll tell you what do," he announced at last. "I was getting ten a week—I'll show you agreement with Mildenhall tomorrow morning——"

"No, no," cried Miss Trant. "I don't want to see it. Go on, ple

"Now, if you want me to, I'll produce for you. I'm sure none of boys and girls would object to that. I know the business all throu

"You mean that you would rehearse everything and be responsible the programmes? That would be splendid, Mr. Nunn. Just wh wanted! Thank you."

"It's a pleasure, Miss Trant," he said solemnly. "And not only I produce for you—and it means a lot of extra work—but I'll drop pounds a week, making it eight. No, listen. Instead of that two pou I'll take fifteen per cent of your net profits. Now I've worked that somewhere"—he brought out his notebook—"and you'll see it mea yes, here you are—it means that I'm not making up that two pou unless you're making over thirteen a week net profit. Mind you, tell you this—you won't make it at first. Don't expect it. We've to pull the show together, and then again this is between seasons. S mer's over and it isn't winter. And another thing, we haven't got dates right yet. We can't take Mildenhall's dates, at least not all of ' 'cos they're terrible. But that'll tell you whether I believe in the sh or not."

"I'm sure you do," said Miss Trant warmly. "And I'm only too g to accept that arrangement of yours. One thing I want to change, the way, and that's the name. I don't like it, and besides I think ought to start all over again."

"Not a bad name, you know," he replied thoughtfully. "And wn. But that's up to you. We can easily find another, and as you make a fresh start. That might put more heart into the boys and . Very superstitious, us pro's, Miss Trant, and all sorts of little gs bother us. Oh, and there's another thing. What about taking hese two new fellows? I've had a talk to 'em, and I advise it my- but it's your business now, you know; you're the boss and you have to pay."

Ir. Jollifant we want, certainly," said the boss, flushing a little, "that he's a good pianist. And I should think he is," she added, hope-.

Heard him before we came on here," said Mr. Nunn, "and he's first-. He makes the last one we had seem like a piano-tuner in a fit. an amateur, but he's got real style. That other chap, Mitcham, rs by him, and he's got a lot of experience. I've heard of him re."

He's a very queer-looking man," she said, dropping her voice. "He s like somebody very grand and important who's all gone to seed."

r. Nunn shut one eye and curved a hand round his mouth. "One he best banjoists in the profession, and a good conjurer," he whis-d. *"And* one of the biggest liars. Wonderful! You have a talk im. I don't say he hasn't seen a lot in his time, but to hear him talk d think he was the Wandering Jew's older brother. He's worth ng on just as a liar. Apart from that, though, he'll be worth his ley all right. The conjuring'll come in as an extra, and he's just t we want for the band. We run a sort of little jazz band, you w, in the show, and a banjoist'll just make it up. I play the drums, for a man who's forgotten what a square meal's like, I can rattle a bit, I don't mind telling you." And he picked up a knife and and gave a little ratta-tat-tat on a plate. "Must use a knife and fork e time, eh?" he observed, at the end of the performance.

erhaps the company thought it a signal for silence, or perhaps it was ely because the dinner was finished, but everybody stopped talking looked rather expectantly towards Miss Trant and Mr. Nunn.

Shall I talk to 'em?" asked Mr. Nunn.

Yes, do," she replied. "But you ought to ask Mr. Jollifant. After all, he's the host. Do you mind, Mr. Jollifant," she said, turning to "if Mr. Nunn explains now what we're going to do?"

"That's the idea of the thing," cried Inigo. "To have a feed and a grand pow-wow of the great chiefs. The idea, absolutely! Say Master Nunn."

That gentleman rose to his feet. "Ladies and gentleman," he be

"Give him a hand," cried Miss Dean, who was in high spirits. they gave him a hand, and so enthusiastically that the waiter, who trying, though not trying very hard, to remove the crumbs from table, was so startled that he retired precipitately. "And not so n of the 'Ladies and gentlemen,' Jimmy!" his friend Joe called out, to disgust of Mrs. Joe, who was sitting erect, with her head a little to side, her eyebrows well raised and her lips pursed up, as if all Dor was looking at its Duchess.

"Boys and girls," said Mr. Nunn, "I'm not going to say much. Yo had a good dinner; I haven't; and you ought to do the talking. I want to say that Miss Trant here, as you know, is going to run show——"

Applause for Miss Trant, in which the speaker himself joins hea The lady smiles confusedly, blushes, and for a moment or two wi herself back at Hitherton.

"And we're going to turn it into the best little Concert Party on road today," Jimmy continued. "We're lucky to have Miss Trant hind us. I think you'll think with me that Miss Trant'll think—h minute, I'm getting too many 'thinks' in here, can't move for What I mean is, I hope Miss Trant will think soon she's been lucky to come across such a show." Cries of "Hear, hear!" and more appl "You'll all be glad to know that we're completing the party at o Mr. Morton Mitcham is joining us, and Mr. Mitcham, both on the b and with the cards, is an artiste of great talent and long and wide —er—thick experience——"

"Four times round the world," that gentleman puts in, taking to say it so that everybody will hear and yet contriving to appear a he has merely spoken his thought aloud.

"Four times round the world," Mr. Nunn repeats, with a certain d emphasis, "having played in Europe, Asia, Africa, America, Austr the Isle o' Man. Am I right, sir?" Laughter and more applause.

o, the place of the late pianist——"

nasty fumbler if there ever was one," remarks Mrs. Joe with great rness.

Vill be taken by Mr. Inigo Jollifant, who is new to the profession s a first-class pianist as those of you who have heard him will testify. you to remember too, boys and girls, that this is Mr. Jollifant's er, though as far as I'm concerned, there hasn't been a supper. But ve all had one, and a good one."

re laughter and still more applause. Mr. Jollifant bows his acknowlnents, and seeing a welcoming smile on the face of Miss Susie Dean, irects at her a specially companionable grin, only to discover that received with a haughty and disdainful stare. When he looks again nds Miss Dean is pointedly drooping an eyelid at Miss Elsie Long-, and he comes to the conclusion that he has just been guyed by this and lively young lady.

r. Nunn has stopped, to confer in whispers with Miss Trant, who her head rapidly. The table is all attention.

ook hare, what about——" begins Mr. Jerry Jerningham, but he no further, being fiercely requested by several of his colleagues to sh."

Now then," remarks Mr. Nunn, "there's just one or two points. As boys and girls know, there's no reason why Miss Trant should pay salaries at all until we start working again. But"—here Mr. Nunn s a deep breath, and everybody looks relieved—"but she says she is ng to pay two weeks' money to all the old members of the party, is, everybody but the two who've just joined. That means we're g paid for this week and last. And there'll be no cutting. Salaries same as before." Here Mr. Nunn, who is too old a hand not to w when applause is coming, stops speaking. He is not disappointed. here is, however, a dissentient. It is Mr. Jerry Jerningham, who now s his beautiful head to voice a protest. "Look hare, Jaymy, thet's all ht about the two weeks' meney. Quaite generous, and all thet."

re we must break in to say that though there is no more graceful exquisite young man in the Midlands than Mr. Jerningham, his nt, a comparatively recent acquisition, unfortunately demands this kind of spelling. It is one thing to look at Mr. Jerningham, and another thing to listen to him. The thousands who have crowd from Shaftesbury Avenue since then to see Jerry Jerningham wil recognise this accent, for the simple reason that he afterwards dro it and then picked up another during his successful season on Broad Even the one we are trying to capture now was the third accent he had since he quitted, at the age of seventeen, the outfitter's sho Birmingham.) "But Ai cawn't agree to the same selery. Ai told Mi hall Ai wasn't getting enough, considering the way mai ect was g and he agreed ——"

"Yes, you idiot," Miss Susie cries heatedly. "He'd agree to anyt considering-thet-he-wasn't-going-to-pay-you-anything-et-all. Fancy b ing that up! You're acting like a measly little Sheeny, Jerry Jerr ham."

"Just maind your own business, Susie," he replies. "Nobody e you to bett in. Ai'm talking to Miss Trarnt and Jaymy."

And neither Miss Trant nor Jimmy is looking with any great fa upon him. Both of them, indeed, are annoyed, and Miss Trant is ready to tell the beautiful youth that if he is not satisfied he car She glances with approval at the outspoken Susie. Jimmy is pu than usual and might have been heard, a moment ago, muttering "I blighter," but after a swift whispered aside to Miss Trant—"He's you know. Must try and keep him"—he now adopts a concili attitude. Jerry has said that he is worth more than he is getting. the boys and girls know that. They know that Jerry has been putti across in great style, and will put it across in even greater style soon. But the boys and girls will agree with him, Jimmy Nunn, in times like these an artiste cannot get what he is worth and is s times lucky to get anything at all. Things being what they were, J must keep on at the old rate, like the rest of them. If Jerry's big ch came he could take it. Miss Trant was not going to bind any of t down. She was playing fair with them, and they would play fair her. To all this the boys and girls gave a hearty assent, and Jerningham, whose chief desire had been to call attention to his importance, gracefully signified that he would condescend to join t at the same salary as before.

What's the programme then now, Jimmy?" Mr. Brundit calls out, voice that reminds everybody once again that many-brave-hearts-are-ep-in-the-deep-so-beware. "Got to start again, haven't we?"

'm coming to that now, Joseph," Mr. Nunn informs him. "First g, then—rehearsals. We've got to rehearse as if we'd never seen one her. Isn't that so? Well, what I propose is this—and, by the way, ght to have said that Miss Trant wants me to produce for her and he general big noise until she's got her hand in—we stop here and arse."

here are groans from the boys and girls, who have had quite enough Rawsley. "A place," Mrs. Joe observed, "that would take the blood of a stone."

That's all right. I know how you feel about it," Jimmy continues, I'm all for the first train out myself. But one thing you've got emember. We can't have a Treasury tomorrow—a little sub might anaged, that's all—because Miss Trant's got to have time to get her ey through. It'll be Saturday or Monday before the ghost walks. we'll have to settle up before we go. The other thing is, we've the use of the hall this week and can rehearse there, and might get use of it in the mornings and afternoons for a pound or two or for ing if we stick out for it when we pay up, for part of next week. date for next week's already cancelled. We could get a two or three t stand between here and Sandybay, where we're going the week , and try out the new show then. How's that? Oh, and another g! We're going to change the name. Miss Trant doesn't like the we've got and anyhow we ought to start afresh with another one ange the luck, y'know. Now, any ideas for a new name?"

veral of them suggest names, all of which, it is triumphantly proved, been used before—"for ages, my dear, simply ages." Mr. Joe ndit (it is impossible to call him Courtney at such a moment) quite nnly proposes they should call themselves "The Mugs"—he calls "catchy"—but is at once howled down. His wife brings out "The nnas," admits that she has forgotten what a Duenna is, but points that it has a fine operatic flavour. Summarily rejected. Mr. Morton ham is heard remarking that "The Wallahs," the name of a troupe oached at either Simla or Bangalore in Nought Five, might be revived. His suggestion not meeting with approval, he rises—lookin Miss Dean observes, as if he is never going to stop—and after clea his throat in a very impressive manner and lowering his gigantic brows at those persons who are still talking, he says: "Miss Trant, l and gentlemen. While we are cudgelling our brains to find a sui name for the show, I propose—as I have proposed on many occasio many different parts of the world before today—that we should— exhibit our appreciation, that is, display our grateful thanks, to our my friend, and your new colleague, Mr. Inigo Jollifant. Mr. Joll and I have already had some—er—interesting experiences together, gone through bad times and good times. We met—er—in extraordi circumstances—as Mr. Jollifant will remember." He paused, and e body stared at Inigo, who began to feel that he and Mitcham must r have wandered across whole continents together. There was somet compelling about Mitcham's epical imagination. "And on that occa after a very short acquaintance, I told him he was a trouper, a trouper. Those of you who are not—er—familiar with the Transatl Stage may not know the term. It is one, I may say, of the highest p I knew then that our friend, Mr. Jollifant, was a good trouper. has proved to all of you, ladies and gentlemen, tonight that he is a trouper. And I propose that we all show our appreciation. Mr. fant!"

And they all do show their appreciation. Mr. Jollifant is called to reply. He grins, thrusts back his lock of hair, grins again, and back the lock in its usual place. It is, he stammers, awfully goo everybody. He is overwhelmed, absolutely. He is not sure wh trouper is. His knowledge of America is very small and is c derived from a study of *Huckleberry Finn*.

Here he is interrupted by no less a person than Miss Trant, with w *Huckleberry Finn* is a very old favourite indeed, and who now b claps her hands and cries "Isn't it glorious?"

"Isn't it!" Inigo replies, and looks for a moment as if he is abo sit down and spend the next half-hour talking to Miss Trant about masterpiece. Then he remembers he is making a speech. "As I before, I'm not very sure what a trouper is, except that he or she i who—er—troupes. Therefore, I don't exactly know what constitu d trouper. But if it means being a good companion, or trying to be ood companion, then I'm proud to be called one, absolutely. Some- "—he was in earnest now, saying for once something that was very and important, felt in the heart, and not being, in spite of all his chatter, one of that rapidly increasing horde of glib self-confessors, ould only stammer it out—"somehow—there isn't too much—er— l companionship left—is there? I mean—people don't sort of—pull ther now much, do they? Everybody's—well, not everybody, but a f people—are out for a good time—and that's all right, of course; all for it; the more the merrier, so to speak—but it's nearly always own good time and nobody else's they're out after, isn't it? An l lot of hard nuts about now, somehow—and only soft in the wrong s. Well, of course, I'm not any better than anybody else, bit worse, e say, but I'd like one or two people to say I was a good companion. 's one of the things that's attracted me about this what's it—concert ; a good crowd sticking together. That's where the fun really s in, isn't it? Look here, I'm making an awful mess of this, y'know. gas but I can't really talk—but"—he ends with a sudden burst— uld write it, and I will do before long. Thanks very much."

isten, everybody," Miss Trant calls out at once. "Mr. Jollifant has me the name. I'm sure it's never been used before. We'll call our- s *The Good Companions.* What do you think of that?" She is excited now.

e Good Companions. They are all turning it over and over, tast- t.

go approves of it at once and with enthusiasm.

like it too," cries Miss Susie Dean. "It's original, and it does mean thing, not like the ridiculous 'Dinky Doos.' That always made me s if I was something between a scented cigarette and one of those nny packets of dye that Elsie here's always using. I like the sound is new name. I don't know how it will look on the bills, though," oncludes doubtfully.

do," Mrs. Joe announces in a very deep and gloomy voice. "It will rotten on the bills."

agree. Not enough *dash* about it, if you ask me," says Miss Elsie staff, who is all for dash.

“Too haybrow, Miss Trarnt,” is Mr. Jerningham's comment.

Mr. Nunn closes one eye over it, then the other, and finally dec it is a bit on the stiff side and won't space well on the bills—but— out of the common and will do. Mr. Mitcham comes down on the s side with all the weight of his experience. The combined enthus of Miss Trant and Inigo is more than a match for the vague doubts fears of the others.

“There it is then,” Miss Trant calls out in her clear voice. “V call ourselves *The Good Companions.*”

Here Mr. Mitcham has an inspiration. After saying to Inigo “I this is *mine*,” he rises to his full height and thunders: “Waiter. W are you, waiter? Ah, there you are. Waiter, I want a bottle of p

“Now what kind would you like, sir?” the waiter enquires, c anxiously, as if the cellar is stocked with all manner of ports and h gravely concerned lest the gentleman should not have exactly the r one.

“Oh, something drinkable. What have you got?”

“Well, we've the Tawny at three-and-nine the bottle, and we've Old and Crusted at four-and-six.”

“Than bring a bottle of the Old and Crusted,” and Mr. Mitcham such richness to his vowel sounds that already the wine seems twi old and crusted as it was before. “And glasses round,” he conti “as quick as you can.” After almost chasing the waiter out of the with his eyebrows, Mr. Mitcham sits down with the air of a man not only knows a good wine but also knows how to order a good

“Now he'd make a wonderful feed if I can get him going. Go the style,” Mr. Nunn whispers to his neighbour, Miss Trant. “And got a sketch or two that he can walk away with, right from the ‘go.’ ”

The Old and Crusted has arrived and so have the glasses. “I'm to give you a toast in a minute,” says Mr. Mitcham, “so fill up, e body.” When they are ready, he lifts his glass and cries in a voi such majesty that it brings Mrs. Tidby upstairs from the bar: friends, I give you *‘The Good Companions.’* Long life and good to 'em.”

drink this," Mr. Nunn declares, "if it kills me." And down goes d and Crusted with the rest.

e Good Companions!"

Tidby, nodding and smiling at the door, is invited in to drink alth of the new show, which she does with great gusto, smacking s over the Old and Crusted to indicate perhaps that there is noth- ong with it.

now Mr. Oakroyd's turn. Up to now he has been quiet because diffident man and rather out of his element. All the others are rs of the party, but he is only a guest. There had been some talk that tea-place about him doing something, but nothing has been nce and he is not one to push himself in where he isn't wanted. row he will be wandering on his way again, but he has enjoyed , and must say something to them all before they separate. So raises the large glass, which still has an inch of beer in it, and them all: "Well, I'm nobbut one o' t'audience, as you might say. s is my bit. May you mak' good companions o' t'fowk as comes nd hear you, and nivver look back." And down went the inch .

nk you, Mr. Oakroyd," Miss Trant calls out before anybody else eply. And then she begins speaking in a low voice to Mr. Nunn. Dean, who seems to regard Mr. Oakroyd as her protégé, is ed. "Isn't he sweet?" she cries across the table, and turns to look with her head tilted to one side. "You *are* sweet, you know, Mr. d, aren't you?" And her glance suggests that he is about six high and covered with pink icing.

Mr. Oakroyd is now summoned to the end of the table, where rant and Mr. Nunn are in conference. He exchanges places with who seems rather pleased to find himself next to Miss Dean, still and altogether very attractive.

v listen, Mr. Oakroyd," Miss Trant is saying. "Mr. Nunn says handyman like you would be very useful to us——"

e carpenter, props and baggage man, lights, doorman where bill-poster where needed," Mr. Nunn rattles off this list with an . "And of course any odd jobs."

' Mr. Oakroyd rubs his chin. You would not suppose for a moment that he is delighted. “Well, I know nowt about the-aters, at all but what you can see from t’gallery. I could pick a deal dare say. I can do owt I want to do wi’ my hands as a rule. summat you want doing or a reg’lar job?”

“We want you to travel round with us, Mr. Oakroyd, as our h man,” Miss Trant explained. “And I’m sure you’d soon learn any you didn’t know that had to be known. About lights, for instance.

A grin slowly broadens over Mr. Oakroyd’s face. “One o’ t’ *Companions,* eh? By gow, I’ll have a do at it, I will an’ all.”

“And Mr. Nunn suggests three pounds a week ——”

“Plus train fares and any extra expenses,” Mr. Nunn adds. “And money too. Coming in regularly—very good money.”

“Would that be all right, Mr. Oakroyd?”

“Eh, I should think so, Miss. Three pund i’ t’week and nobbut r to keep! Nivver thowt I’d end up as a the-ater chap! This beats t his does.” And he chuckles away.

“That’s all right, then, is it? Will you come down to the Ass Rooms in the morning, Mr. Oakroyd?”

“Nobbut say t’word,” says Mr. Oakroyd earnestly, “and I’ll be at half-past six wi’ my tools.”

“Half-past six!” Mr. Nunn gives a capital imitation of a gent who has just received a severe blow at the back of the head. “ isn’t such a time, not in the morning—never heard of it—don’t it exists. Nay, lad. Half-past ten’s our time.”

“Day’s half ower i’ Bruddersford by then. Happen you know dersford, Mr. Nunn?”

“I do know Bruddersford,” Mr. Nunn replies in tragic a “Everybody knows it, except the lucky ones. Ask Susie there a She calls it ‘Shuddersford.’ It’s generally known to the pro though as ‘The Comedian’s Grave!’ ”

“Eh, whativver for?” enquires Mr. Oakroyd, his face quite w “I’ve heard tell of ’em calling it t’place where they hammer You hear all sorts, don’t you, Mr. Nunn?” And he leans back chair and calmly stares at the ceiling.

Miss Trant, after looking at the pair of them, laughs a litt Mr. Nunn laughs too, and then Mr. Oakroyd begins to chuckle ey're a bit o' good company, this lot," he tells himself, and when he mbers that he is not leaving them tomorrow but is going to travel ver the place and do odd jobs and have three pounds a week, he ready to burst.

w they are calling "Miss Trant. Spee-eech, Miss Trant. Spee-eech." rst she shakes her head, but the boys and girls will take no refusal, r. Nunn is careful to point out to her.

haven't anything to say at all, you know," she tells them, "except I'm sure we shall all get on very well together. You must forgive I make mistakes or say anything silly, because, as you know, I really understand this business. I haven't even seen you on the which is rather absurd, isn't it? But I'm sure you're all very and work very hard and—and—tomorrow and afterwards when Good Companions you'll be cleverer still and work harder." hter and applause. "And now I'm going to bed. Yes, I am. I've n awfully long and exciting day—it seems to have lasted about a —and now I'm tired."

, don't go, Miss Trant," Susie implores.

hy not?"

ell, if you go, I shall feel I ought to go too, and though I'm tired , I hate to think I'm missing anything."

ready to go, Susie," Miss Longstaff tells her.

, all right then," cries Susie. "I suppose all us feemiles had better f together, and leave the men to stay here until they're kicked out. you just see them here when we've gone—going yaw-yaw-yaw and aw-haw and all of 'em nearly dying of conceit? I do think men diculous," she concludes, putting her nose in the air.

u stick fast to that opinion of the men, my dear," Mrs. Joe tells and you might have a chance of getting to the top of the tree." with that, the good lady rises, informs her husband that he can nother glass and no more, and stay just half an hour, then departs he other three members of her sex.

the men, sitting down again with that fine careless ease that when the women go, do have another and do yaw-yaw-yaw and aw-haw, and while they are doing that, Inigo discovers that Jerry gham, with his good looks and grace and weird accent, his determination to top the bill and have his name in electric lights before l or perish, his grave and almost ascetic devotion to his flimsy little is altogether an astonishing person; and Mr. Oakroyd discovers Joe, whom he recognises at once as a man after his own heart, is not partial to a pipe of *Old Salt* (to say nothing of a glass of beer) b also a fellow enthusiast in the matter of football, at which little Ge will very soon distinguish himself—and surprise some of 'em, it app —at Denmark Hill; and Jimmy Nunn and Morton Mitcham disc that they remember any number of "pros" who have got ther dropped out or lifted an elbow too often or gone into managemen taken a nice little pub somewhere. Mrs. Tidby reappears, to hope e thing was to their liking and to point out once again that the n was short, and then to glance significantly at the clock. The old w yawns, pushes a few glasses about in an aimless fashion, returns change on a little wet tray, smiles vaguely when told to keep it, yawns again. They troop out into the deserted streets and stop a mi with a faint shrinking sense of irony, to look up at the thinning cl and the mild stars beyond. "You going my way? Right you Good night, boys. Good night, ol' man. Goo' night."

Chapter Two

VERY SHORT, AND DEVOTED TO REHEARSALS

GO seemed to spend all his waking hours, the next few days, on
he improvised stage at the Rawsley Assembly Rooms, pounding
on the ancient Broadwood Grand. Two of the notes, the first G
e treble and the lower D in the bass, were in the habit of sticking,
even by the end of the first day he had come to know those two
so well that they had taken on a personal life of their own, so
he appeared to have spent hours quarrelling with two obstinate
yellow men: Tweedlegee and Twoodledee, he called them. His
and forearms began aching by about twelve on Friday morning,
fter that—though Sunday was a holiday—they went on aching
at last he forgot to notice them. It did not matter whether the
Companions sang choruses, quartets, trios, duets, or individual
ers, he had to be at work. And if they stopped singing and took
cing instead, then he had to work all the harder. For him there
o rest. Each member of the troupe prided himself or herself on
a large répertoire, known always as a "rep," and insisted on
through it at some time or other with the new pianist, who soon
to dislike the very mention of "reps."

ever knew there were so many dirty tattered old sheets of music
the world," Inigo confided to Miss Trant. This was after he had
ed through Jimmy Nunn's rep, which was the dirtiest, oldest, and
ttered of all. Many of Jimmy's songs, which did little more than
ce that their singer was a policeman ("When you're going down
eet, You will see me on my beat, For I'm a Policeman—*pom*—
m a Policeman") or a postman or a waiter or some other droll
character, were in manuscript, and were further complicated by
ions scrawled in in pencil—"Stop for patter," and so forth. For-
y it did not matter very much what he played for Jimmy, who
ear and no singing voice, and only demanded that the accom-

paniment should stop in various odd places in order that he shoul
able to point out that his father was a very mean man, or describe,
a wealth of unlikely detail, his wedding day. Indeed, the relation
tween Jimmy's singing and the piano was so vague that he had su
whole verse of a policeman song to the accompaniment intended f
postman before either he or Inigo had noticed the mistake. "Hav
use the old uns, my boy," said Jimmy, carefully removing from
piano a sheet that was dropping to pieces. "They don't write real c
songs now, you can take it from me." And Inigo was quite rea
agree that these masterpieces had obviously been written a great n
years ago. His only hope was that he would be able to vamp the ac
paniments by heart before most of the scores crumbled away altog

The respective reps of the two Brundits were in rather better con
than Jimmy's, being mostly composed of well-printed ballads, but
were far larger, especially Mrs. Joe's, a very stout portfolio with "
Stella Cavendish" printed on it in scarlet letters. "I don't think t
a bigger and classier rep on the C. P. stage today," she told him pr
But it was not necessary to go through it all. Inigo was a quick r
and found this easy ballad stuff mere child's play. After Mrs. Joe,
flashing eye and heaving bosom, had tunefully cautioned a son o
against doing something or other, had suggested that the roses i
heart would never bloom again like the roses in her garden, had
manded the red sun to sink in-toe the We-est, had waited for one A
MacDonald to return from some mysterious campaign, had said
bye to leaves and trees and kisses on the brow and practically
thing, and had finally announced that she must go down to th
again; in short, after Mrs. Joe had tried over about half a dozen
most popular numbers, she expressed herself as being not only sa
but delighted, mopped her face with one hand and patted Inigo
shoulder with the other, and told him he was a pianist with a
a talent, a soul, and in short was a downright find. "You've g
the style for me, Mr. Jollifant," she cried warmly, and asked eve
present to agree with her. Inigo, who had been quietly enjoyin
self by indulging in an ironical over-emphasis, looked round to s
Miss Susie Dean, who was standing near, was regarding him
cool and speculative eye. At once the praise of the simple son

e him feel uncomfortable. He glanced apologetically towards Susie thought of her now as Susie—but that young lady immediately her nose a little higher than usual and looked away. Inigo then to the conclusion that he was not such a clever young man as he magined himself to be.

gave Inigo more trouble than Mrs. Joe had done, though his rep neither so big nor so classy. "Joe's got the Voice but not the Train- his wife explained. "And if he's not going to get off the note , he'll have to have some of his numbers transposed. I told that e creature that ran off with Mildenhall, but of course it was no alking to *her*. She couldn't play a straight accompaniment, let transpose. As I told Joe this morning, you're a real musician, so won't mind putting some of his numbers down a semi-tone or a ' And Inigo did put some of them down a semi-tone or a tone, obody except Mrs. Joe, who was quite triumphant, even imagined de any difference. Joe's rough, powerful voice still refused to keep e note; towards the end of a song it wavered between several differ- otes; and usually at the very end it wandered into another key ther. Moreover, it cannot be denied that Joe was a very wooden st. He stiffened his massive body, clenched his fists, and roared he was purple in the face. It was not so bad when his themes were al and it was his duty to point out the various perils of the eep, but when he tried to turn himself into a melodious victim of nder passion, when he declared that he heard you whisper his among the roses or admitted that he had been standing 'neath your w in the moonlight or confessed that he thought of nothing night y but two bright eyes and two white arms, and stood there bellow- fteen stone of taut muscle and stiff bone, with his big chin jutting is forehead gemmed with beads of perspiration, and his two fists ntly ready at any moment to deliver a knock-out, then it was very ndeed not to smile at honest Joe. Miss Trant, who chanced to he hall when one of his love lyrics was in full blast, had to retire back so that he would not catch sight of her face. "What on earth Mr. Brundit sing love songs?" she asked Susie afterwards. "I mind what he sings, of course, but anybody less love-sick I can't e." Susie laughed. "I know. Poor Joe!—he sounds as if he's shouting for steak and onions, doesn't he? Mrs. Joe—our Stella—ma him sing them. They don't go down badly, either. People must th it hurts him more than it hurts them, so they give him a hand. I ad Joe, though. He's a lot nicer than the men who *can* sing love song can tell you. I've known some of them. Ugh!"

When the two girls of the party came to rehearse their indivi numbers with him, Inigo had an unpleasant surprise. He found he enjoyed playing to Elsie more than he did to Susie. Elsie came and ran through about half a dozen songs, mostly of American ori songs at once plaintive and impudent, in which somebody had ei never had a "sweetie" or had just lost one. Elsie sang these in a l tinny nasal voice that seemed itself an importation from the Un States, and after the last two she danced in quite an engaging and g ful fashion, making the most of her shapely self. To Inigo, loo over the piano at her as soon as he could dispense with the few rep bars of music that accompanied the dance-steps, she seemed very at tive, in spite of the fact that he had always thought her too fair fluffy, too saucer-eyed, too scented, at once too demure and too flaun too much the ageing kitten, and had never had five minutes' am talk with her. Until then, indeed, he had seen her as a rather silly empty woman—and, after all, she was a woman, several years his s —and had set her down as "affected and cosmeticated, and a bit har mean inside." But now, when she twirled away, smiled at him, "Quicker, please," smiled again as they increased the pace togethe seemed to have distinct charm, and he saw an audience warming act, thin and conventional though it might be. And when, at th pink and rather breathless, she clapped her hands and came over t crying "Oh, thanks ever so much! That was topping. You d beautifully, don't you?", and he replied "That was fun, wasn't it Longstaff?", and she said that she couldn't be Miss Longstaff any but must be Elsie and he must be Inigo—then he began to feel the really friends.

This was a surprise but not unpleasant. It was Susie who su him unpleasantly. To begin with, she was so disappointing. Nunn, the Brundits, and even Jerningham, had all told him ho derful Susie was; easily the best little comedienne on the Concert e, they said, and a coming star on any stage; not simply hard-work- and clever with a touch or two of originality but—you know. And new. He had watched her closely ever since they first met, which only last Thursday but already seemed months ago, and was only willing to believe anything they said of her. He could see her on stage—the nimble but sturdy figure of her, the piquant dark face, ing with fun, and the performance itself, a rush of high spirits, a ure of charm and drollery with just a glint, the tiniest glint, of os. And then when she came to rehearse with him, it was not like at all. She sang a few songs in a husky little voice; they were poor gs, flimsier than Elsie's, even, and she went through them listlessly, heartedly. She did a little step-dancing, but that was half-hearted Now and again she stopped him: he was too slow, too fast, or he halt in such a place. That was all. It was woefully disappointing.

say,” he began, when she had done and was putting her music her.

ell, what is it, Professor?”

hose songs of yours—they're not much good, are they?” He saw pening her eyes to stare at him. “I mean—pretty feeble—eh?”

h, do you think so?” There was rising and dangerous inflection in oice.

ather! Thin stuff, tissue paper, absolutely! You must get fed up ng 'em, don't you? Quite apart from the words, think of the tunes. t are they? Lord, I could invent half-a-dozen better ones in a ing.”

ould you really?”

ith ease,” the rash young man continued. “I don't say mine dn't be tripe, but there's tripe and tripe, isn't there?”

suppose so,” she said, softly now. “I never touch it myself. But , please, go on.”

ell, I mean to say,” he went on, a little less sure of himself, “if things are the best that are going, we'll pension 'em off and con- ome of our own. What d'you think?”

l tell you what I think,” she said fiercely. “I think you've got a ed cheek. Now then! Sitting there coolly telling me my songs l rot! And you haven't been in the show five minutes. Never seen

an audience in your life! D'you think I'm in your—your—infant cl
Oh yerse," she went on, holding up her head and speaking in a thr
voice that was a vindictive imitation of Inigo's, "ther's trape and tr
isn't ther? Oh, ab-so-lutely!" Then, with a furious sweep, she tur
and caught sight of Jimmy Nunn, who was in conference in the b
of the hall. "Jimmy," she called, "just a minute, Jimmy. You'll perh
be sorry to hear that I shan't be able to appear in the show. No, im
sible! Mr. Jollifant, who's so kindly condescended to play for us,
my songs aren't worth playing."

"I didn't," Inigo protested.

"Yes, of course you did," she retorted. "And what I'd like to k
is—who do you think you are? The last pianist we had was p
foul, but at least she didn't tell us what we had to sing."

"Now then, you kids," Jimmy called to them. "Remember y
going to have something tasty for your tea, and I'm not. Pity
James! Ease up, Susie. And you apologise, Jollifant. I don't ca
you haven't done anything, say you're sorry. It's the only way with
Take it easy, the pair of you."

"I'm awfully sorry, Susie——"

"Miss Dean, thank you."

"All right. Miss Dean, then," replied Inigo with dignity. "I re
I'm awfully sorry if I've offended you. I didn't mean to."

"Yes, that's the only way with 'em, isn't it? Well, it isn't with
Susie picked up her music. "I'm sorry you don't like these nun
because you're going to hear them quite a lot. Anyhow, I'm goi
sing them. And if you wrote the best soubrette songs in the w
here and now, I wouldn't sing them, not if you paid me to sing t
And that's that." And off she marched, her head in the air.

Jimmy came up a few minutes afterwards, and Inigo told him
had happened. Jimmy whistled for a minute, then puckered up his
and looked drolly at his companion. "There's one thing they
teach you at Cambridge, my boy," he said finally, "and it's some
you'll have to learn at this job. That's tact. Don't say these th
Think 'em but don't put 'em in the book of words. In this profe
the men are bad enough. But the women! Touchy! Dynamit
boy. One word and up they go! Besides, Susie's numbers are

gh. I don't say they couldn't be better. But you see what she does 'em on the night. They all eat out of her hand."

ut that's the point," said Inigo. "I should never have said anything s is between ourselves—if I hadn't been so disappointed. I expected thing wonderful from her, and I thought she was awfully dull."

hearing this, Jimmy gave an excellent imitation of a distinguished nomer who has just been told that the world is flat. He groaned; oked heavenwards; he beat his brow. "What d'you think this is?" ied, waving a hand at the empty hall. "A command performance? u think them chairs with the bit of plush left on are the Royal ly? D'you think that pillar there's Sir Oswald Stoll, with his ts full of new contracts?"

t me take a turn at this," cried Inigo, good humouredly enough, h in truth he was still rather nettled. "And do I think this piano box office of Drury Lane? The answer is—I don't. And what ?"

my laughed. "Only this. Susie wasn't bothering, that's all. Wait u see her in front of an audience. I tell you, she can make a hit the duddest number you ever shut your ears to. Leave it to her, oy. Susie's all right."

see." Inigo played a little phrase, softly, reflectively, then ended a sudden crash. "You can expect some songs from me now, Jimmy, s, if we can get some words. The tunes come easily enough, but 't write the sort of stuff they want as words for them."

my inside lets me alone for a day or two," said Jimmy, "I can do that way myself. We'll get together and fit 'em in. This is how it s. If you've got a good melody, then I'll try to find words for it. e a likely lyric, you try to find a tune. And don't forget to try hand on that opening chorus I've got ready."

ght you are. I'm going to show Miss Susie that I wasn't exactly g through my hat just now. She said she wouldn't dream of singnything I ever wrote. We'll see about that. I'll write something make her eat her words, or I'll bust." And, so fired by the scorn sie, who must be *shown,* he set to work in earnest, and the two of spent all the next day, Sunday, with a wreck of a cottage piano, the pride of Jimmy's lodgings, and some music manuscript paper Jimmy had unearthed.

On Monday morning, Inigo rehearsed with Jerry Jerningham, carefully divested himself of his coat and waistcoat and then, for next hour, worked like the nigger of legend. His voice was no b than it is now, was indeed the same plaintive and rather nasal cr hardly worth calling a voice at all, yet most artfully adapted for work it had to do. Jazz, which had begun as an explosion of bar high spirits, a splash of crimson and black on a drab globe, had bec civilised; it was quieter, more subtle, and flirted with sentiment cynicism; its first bold colours faded to autumnal tints; its butt gaieties were for ever fluttering down into melancholy; its insis rhythms were like the soft plug-plugging of those great machines now keep whole populations waiting upon them, devouring so muc people's time and yet leaving their minds partly free to wander— to wonder; and in its own crude, jigging, glancing fashion, as it with a grin and shrug of home and love to the crowds of the hom and unloved, it contrived to express all the sense of baffled desire the sad nostalgia of the age. History, which attends to folk son well as the migrations of peoples, had produced this Jazz, and Na working obscurely in a long dark street in a Midland city, had duced a Jerry Jerningham, this Antinous in evening dress and dan slippers, to match the event. Jerry's voice was nothing, yet it w have been impossible to find a better for these songs. And his feet, two astonishingly energetic and versatile commentators, said all the As soon as he began pit-patting with those feet, Jerry suddenly be a real person, confessing things, making original remarks about His feet pondered, sank into despair, began to hope, took cou laughed and carolled, became crazed with happiness, were touched doubt, wondered uneasily, shrugged and turned cynical, all with a ingly careless grace.

Inigo had found it difficult to like this beautiful and vacant young but now he found it easy enough to respect him. Jerningham have a mind as blank as a new slate, and the most atrociously aff accent in the country; he might be all narrow ambition and co but he was an artist—not merely an artiste, but an artist. And ho ked! It was his ambition to be the most graceful lounger, the best ll the idle fops of revue and musical comedy, and to achieve these erfly perfections he trained like an athlete and toiled like a slave. the stage, Inigo had discovered that Jerningham could be easily red; but now at rehearsal he saw another young man, who knew tly what he wanted, not merely from himself but from everybody and had made up his mind not to be baulked; he was in his own sphere, and at once flashed into life, like a fish put back into water. played with unusual zest to the very end. Jerningham leaned nst the piano, smiled across it and then carefully wiped his forehead a lilac silk handkerchief.

y George!—but you can dance, though," cried Inigo enthusiastically. e my playing was all right? This syncopated stuff's rotten to read ght."

lly faine," said Jerningham. "Ai laike your playing. Jest what Ai ted. You've got the Jaizz tech. You'll make a lat of difference to aind too." He mopped himself delicately again. "Gled you laike arncing. Ai'm pretty good at those steps, but Ai warnt some new very bardly."

go flourished a manuscript. "You listen to this," he cried. "It's g Jimmy and I wrote yesterday. The tune's one I've had in my for some time, and now Jimmy's put some words to it."

hat's the taitle?"

ippin' round the Corner," Inigo told him. I'll play it to you while resting." And once again the mischievous little tune came danc- ut of the keys. Long before Inigo had finished, Jerningham was ng over his shoulder at the manuscript and humming and tapping et.

n, but it's a wanderful little namber!" cried Jerningham, with ected enthusiasm. "There's nathing going to tech it, nathing, rnt. And it's mai namber, isn't it? Must be mai namber, Ai "

s, you can sing it," Inigo replied, with grim satisfaction. He was ing of Susie.

ingham was going through the words now. "Ai must tray this Ai ralely must. You know you look like being a gold-maine, Jallifarnt. Now do pramise you'll let me sing this for at least tw three months before you send it anywhere?"

"Oh, that's all right. I wasn't thinking of sending it anywhere."

"But mai dear boy, of course you must. There's pats of meney things like this, pats. Shahly you knew thart!" And Jerning opened wide his velvety brown eyes to stare at this strange fellow. " let's tray it now. Here's Jaymy and Mitcham. We're just going to this namber of yours, Jaymy."

Jerningham took the manuscript—Inigo knowing the music by h —and went through one verse and chorus rather slowly. Then he t the second verse and took the chorus at quicker pace, his feet ma little movements to the lilt of it. "Now we'll tray it all over a please, Jallifarnt, and we'll put the snep into it. Raight you are." when he came to repeat the chorus, he was accompanied by Mitcham's banjo and Jimmy on the drums. The four of them everything slipping gloriously round the corner, and Inigo danced on piano stool, improvised the most astounding variations and flouri and laughed in his excitement. "Repeat, repeat," cried Jerningham, immediately stopped singing and began dancing properly, while other three, their heads wagging away, slipped and slipped and sli round the corner.

"But where, where, where did you get that duck, that perfect fat duck of a number?" It was Susie who came rushing on the s They had not noticed she was about. They had not noticed anyt "Never mind," she cried. "Tell me afterwards. Let's have it again let's have it again. I want to try it with Jerry."

So off they went again, repeating the chorus, with Susie, very exci humming and putting in all manner of strange words, dancing with Jerningham. After a minute or two, the men stopped.

"Go on, go on, boys," she cried. "You're not going to stop, are Can't I have it again?"

No, she couldn't, they told her. They were all blown.

"Well, now you can tell me," said Susie. "Whose is it and wher it come from? Tell me all about it."

"It's mai new namber, Susie," Jerningham panted.

"And there's the boy who wrote it," said Mr. Mitcham, pointin

. “And as soon as he let me hear it, I said ‘That’s a winner, my I can tell ’em. Went back to my hotel once in Chicago and there waiter there—little Jew boy—heard him picking out a tune on the , very quietly—nobody about, you see. I went straight up to ——”

t he had to finish his anecdote in the wings, where Jimmy and gham were taking deep breaths. Susie had not stayed to listen She had rushed over to Inigo at the piano.

o you mean to say you wrote that?” she demanded.

smiled at her. “Well, Jimmy wrote the words, but I wrote the It’s—er—one of those little things of mine I believe I mentioned u the other day. A poor thing but mine own; absolutely.”

ie stared at him, breathing hard. “And you’ve let Jerry Jerning- have it?”

s, why not?”

ell, you are a mean pig to give it to him like that, and not even e hear it first. I didn’t think you could be so—so—unfriendly, so l.”

t you said ——”

now what I said. But of course I didn’t *mean* it. You ought to known I didn’t mean it. Besides, I thought if you did write any- it would be dreadful—they usually are—and not something really like that. And just because ——” She paused.

cause what?” He had stopped smiling now. He was busy trying ke head or tail of these remonstrances that came flashing out ut any kind of logical sequence that he could discover, and at the time he was telling himself how pretty she was. No, it wasn’t rettiness. Nor could you call it beauty. But there it was, infinitely tful and disturbing.

v she suddenly dropped her indignation. “It doesn’t matter, of . It’s nothing. But I thought we were going to be friends, and vious we’re not. That’s all. I suppose you’re writing another now sie Longstaff. No, I’m really cross now. I wasn’t before, and you to have seen I wasn’t. And I’m not cross now. Yes, I know. I ht I was but I wasn’t. I’m just—well, I’m disappointed. That’s She lowered her eyes as her voice trailed away. There was a

moment's silence. Then she tried to look brisk and cheerful. (
Inigo, bewildered but not yet entirely unobservant, did not know wh
it was.) "It really is a good little number," she said, with all the br
brightness of a conscientious hostess. "And I must say, you're
clever. You'll make quite a lot of money if you keep on turning
things like that." And she strolled away, her head in the air.

This was Inigo's triumph, but he did not enjoy it. He sat there
ing rather ashamed of himself, though somewhere at the back of
mind was a cool little fellow who whispered that he had no reaso
be ashamed of himself, that he had just been humbugged out of
triumph. Then she came back, ran across the stage, her face aligh

"I don't want you to think I'm bad-tempered, because I'm not, r
I'm not," she cried, putting her elbows on the piano and resting
chin in her hands. In this position she could look at him steadily,
she did look at him steadily. "Now, aren't you sorry you gave
number to Jerry Jerningham instead of me? I know I haven't sh
you yet what I can do, and I know that Jerry's very clever in his
way. I believe you were very disappointed in me the other day, we
you?" she enquired, rather plaintively.

"Well, I don't know——" Inigo stammered, feeling it impossibl
look away and equally impossible to say what he had thought wit
eyes still fixed on hers.

"Are you really a spiteful person? You don't look like one. I tho
at first you were rather nice."

"I am," he replied, trying to be the good-humoured, rather whim
middle-aged gentleman, and not succeeding at all. "I'm usually
sidered specially nice. 'Here comes that nice Mr. Jollifant,' they
He put on the indulgent smile of forty-five, but felt it wobble.

"Are you? I wonder." She stared at him with a kind of inn
speculation for a moment. "But you mustn't try to patronise me
because you're about three years older than I am, you know.
just the same age really."

This was his chance. "Yes, yes," he murmured. "And now y
going to tell me that a girl is always years older than a man. I k
You've been reading magazine stories and light fiction from Boots

"I wasn't going to say anything of the kind," she protested, almos iftly. "I was going to say I'd seen a lot more of life than you have. hen I thought I wouldn't. 'It might hurt his nice little conceit of mself,' I said to myself. So I didn't. If you want to be friends with a an, you mustn't ever say anything to hurt his precious vanity, and as at's always as big as a row of houses and tender all over, you have to awfully careful."

"Oh, do you want to be friends, then?"

"Perhaps." She stood up now, gave a twirl or two. "I haven't made my mind—quite."

"Do make up your mind. I'm all for it, absolutely," he said, turning to an eager youth again. "What's the good of being a Good Com- nion, if you're not friends."

"Mr. Oakroyd's my new friend," she remarked, still twirling. "Ahr ss. Did you know his name's Jess? It's Jesiah, really. Isn't that too eet? He comes to me and asks all about curtains and footlights and ot-lights and props, and he goes about looking so important when he's ything to do. He's already mended my basket for me. He says 'It'll champion nar, Soos.' He calls me 'Soos,' and tells me all about uddersford and the Gurt North Roo-ad. We're very thick, I can tell u. I heard him saying to Miss Trant, 'Her and ahr Lily's as like as o peeas.' What d'you think of that?" She hummed a bar or two of *ippin' round the Corner,* and tried a few steps. Then she smiled at igo.

"Do you know what you're going to do now, Mr. Inigo Jollifant?" e cried softly. "You're going to write another song, just as good as at, if not a wee bit better, and that number will be all for me. I can e it coming. And—listen—I'll promise to put all I know into it, and en one day a big manager from the West End will hear me singing and he'll send for you and he'll send for me, and we'll both make r fortunes. You'll have Francis, Day, and Hunter sitting on your orstep, and I'll have fifteen agents fighting on the stairs. Now don't y you can't do it, because I know you can, you're so clever. Do you ow, I said at once when I saw you, 'That boy with the lock of hair d the ridiculous knapsack doesn't look like a pro, but he looks a *ever* boy.' That's exactly what I said. And now, isn't that what u're going to do?"

And, strangely enough, Inigo admitted that it was. He even w so far as to add that already he had a tune in his head that might if Jimmy could dig up some words. "And are we friends again no he enquired.

"But of course we are," she replied. "Though we don't know e other very well, do we? But we're going to work very hard togeth Then she looked him over rather severely. "But, you know, you must take these little things so seriously. Mind that."

Before he could reply, she was giving a lightning imitation of pompous gentleman fingering a large, pointed, and very import moustache. "Little things, you know, Mistah—ar—Jollifant," croaked. "Me-ah differences of o-pin-yon, what! The kaind of thi that may happen at any mo-oh-ment—what!" Then she instantly came herself again, blew him a kiss, and tripped away.

Inigo stared after her and drew a very deep breath. Having had s innocents as Felton and Daisy Callander of Washbury Manor to d with, he had come to see himself inevitably taking the lead, leapi from position to position and beckoning to the duller-witted who lu bered after him; but he could not help feeling that he had now m than met his match. Susie left him gasping. Being friends with was going to be very exciting. It appeared that his imagination h probably not deceived him when, hearing her voice in the tea-room, had seen a curtain go shooting up. That curtain was still going higher and higher.

Chapter Three

WHICH COLONEL TRANT'S DAUGHTER GOES INTO ACTION, STICKS TO HER GUNS, AND MAY BE CONSIDERED VICTORIOUS

I

AVING taken the plunge, Miss Trant found herself at once in another world. It was, so far, chiefly a world of tea and chops and rams. The tea and chops came from her Rawsley landlady, who very interested, very sympathetic, but unpunctual with meals. It her habit to offer Miss Trant odd cups of tea the moment she saw coming in, whatever the hour; and the meals, when they did arrive, ed to be always a chop—a "nice chop," which apparently meant that was burnt on the outside and quite raw in the interior. "Sit down and 'ave a cup o' tea, Miss Trant, and I'll do you a nice ," this was the good lady's formula. Fortunately, Miss Trant was lly ever hungry that first week. Perhaps it was the telegrams that away her appetite. Although the Trants had for generations le a trade, as it were, out of alarms and excursions, a telegram had been something of an event at Hitherton, and even at the Old Hall sight of a little brown envelope called up visions of catastrophe. now the little brown envelopes fell in showers. The telegram was arently the common method of communication in this extraordinary ld, where everybody seemed to be "wiring" everybody else. mpted by Jimmy Nunn, armed with the current number of *The ge,* she "wired" the proprietors of Winter Gardens, Alfresco Pavilions, rsaals, Châlets, and Playhouses, mostly in places she had never heard before, and even such people as printers and costumers had to be red" too; and all these wires promptly produced other wires, some hem so compressed that they might as well have been in cipher, and ers of a staggering length and fluency, like strange heads coming round the door and screaming at the top of their voices at her. all the others, only Mr. Oakroyd, who frequently trotted round to Post Office for her, shared her amazement at all this wiring. “E we're keeping all t'telegraph lads i't'country on t'run,” he would “It's war ner workin' for a bookie.” The waste of money appalled h but he could not help being delighted by the dash and importanc it all. At the Post Office he soon became a familiar figure. “If I br yer onny more,” he would tell them, “happen you'll be declarin divvy this year”; and the three young women behind the counter w nod and say, brightly, if vaguely: “That's right”; and they were very friendly.

Living in such a whirl of telegraphy, Miss Trant felt she had no ri to sit down and enjoy a meal at her leisure. She did sit down—tho she always felt she ought to be standing up—but she ate her chop hastily and perfunctorily as her landlady had cooked them. The lat we may say, proffered a brief sketch of a dinner, and Miss Trant, in turn, replied with a brief sketch of a diner. It was only late in evening, when there were no more “dates” to be considered and more problems to be instantly solved, that she achieved any real tenance. This she did by drinking a large cup of cocoa (a weaknes hers) and munching her way through innumerable buttered Diges biscuits while staring at a book. The book was *Barlasch of the Gu* borrowed on payment of twopence and a deposit of half-a-crown fr the little stationer's in the market-place, and very slow the story seen too, after all the telegrams. She was beginning to read these thi with the air of an old soldier listening to a fellow veteran only a year two older than himself.

The problems she had to solve were numerous and for the most fantastic. One of the most reasonable was that of costumes. Like m other concert parties, the late Dinky Doos had made a practice of giv the first part of their entertainment in fancy pierrot costume and second half in evening dress. The Good Companions had decided continue this practice, though two members of the party had protes against it. Mr. Jerningham had objected because he delighted in hi self in evening dress, which he would have worn in the morning if could have done so. Mr. Joe Brundit objected because he always ible with his dress collars—"They fairly saw my head off some hts," he grumbled—and was very gloomy about laundries. These tlemen were allowed to argue with one another, but otherwise no ice was taken of them. Miss Trant discovered, however, that she iked the pierrot costumes worn by the three women. They were ap, faded, cottony things, and must be replaced at once. There ped up in Miss Trant, who had always dressed herself very quietly, ly because she had been timid and partly because she really thought uiet style suited her, a long-hidden lover of the gaudy and fantastic lothes, and this dashing creature hurried off in the car to the nearest e town and showed her shimmering cascades of silk, plunged her orgies of apple-green and scarlet and lilac and jade, called down in of multi-coloured frills and tassels and pompoms. And she found allies. Mrs. Joe was useless, simply a born knitter and nothing e. Nor was Susie much better, for though her taste was reasonably d (Mrs. Joe's was vile), she was much too impatient and not at all er with her fingers, as she readily admitted herself. This was a ppointment to Miss Trant, with whom Susie was already a favourite. vas the fluffy Elsie, the one she liked least so far, who proved herself be a treasure in this matter of costumes. Elsie had a passion for hes; she had good taste; she could design, cut out and sew like a fessional tailor and needlewoman. She also had—as Susie said—a e for clever, cheap dressmakers, and it was she who brought in the ond ally, Miss Thong. There can be no doubt that Miss Thong lly was a clever, cheap dressmaker and that she worked miracles for m those few days, but that is not the reason why she deserves a e space to herself. We must glance at Miss Thong because the ge of her haunted Miss Trant at odd moments throughout that ter. Miss Thong has a part in the homely epic; it is a very tiny t—no more than that of a whispering ghost—but we cannot say as no significance. Miss Trant remembers her to this very day.

he went with Elsie, who knew the way. They walked the length an unusually monotonous street of little brick houses, which ended some waste ground, a melancholy muddle of worn turf, clayey holes, e-netting and ramshackle fowl-houses made out of orange boxes, a few dirty and listless hens. The last house on the left was de-

tached from the row, but was yet so close to it, so obviously still a p
of it, that Miss Trant felt that this house had just been sawn off,
if it were the crust of a long loaf. It looked like a slice too, fo
was severely rectangular and only one room in breadth, being ind
the very narrowest house she had ever seen. It was not old; it was
dingy; it was newish, had a bright glazed look, and was immedia
depressing. There were two little brass plates on the door: one s
Midland Guardian and Widows Fire and Life Assurance and the ot
whispered *Miss Thong—Dressmaker.* The door was opened to th
by the Midland Guardian, who had watery eyes, a drooping grey mo
tache, carpet slippers, and a coat and waistcoat that had seen far
much gravy and egg. Yes, yes, his daughter was in, and they co
see her; but she was busy; she was always busy these days, alw
in great demand; and she wasn't too strong, not really strong enou
for all the work that came. One of these days, he told them as t
went into the tiny sitting-room, he would have to put his foot do
the girl was doing too much. And he shuffled out, to tell her they w
there. "I know the sort of foot he'll put down," Elsie whispered. "
bet she keeps him going all right. If he makes enough out of
insurance to keep him in whisky, I'd be surprised. Silly old bligh
But she isn't strong, either. She's a queer little thing."

She was a queer little thing: no older than Miss Trant herself, p
haps, but very small and crooked, with thin hair pathetically bob
hollow cheeks, and a long nose that seemed to flush in a most unha
manner. Her eyes were bright enough but she had hardly any e
lashes and the lids were slightly reddened. Perhaps she was consumpt
She looked as if she might have anything and everything wrong w
that frail body of hers. It seemed as if one winter's night would
tinguish her for ever. Nevertheless, as soon as she saw Elsie, her f
lit up and she plunged at once into a gasping prattle that never stop
all the way up to the front room upstairs that was her workroom. Wh
she learned that the troupe was to be re-formed under the direction
Miss Trant, she was genuinely delighted, almost in an ecstasy. She
sisted upon telling Miss Trant all about the two performances of
Dinky Doos she had seen when they had been giving the show
first week.

It was such a treat to me, you can't imagine," she gasped. "And
n when Miss Longstaff came here—and I'd seen her only two nights
ore, singing and dancing there and looking prettier than a picture
vell, well, it was a surprise! I stared at her, couldn't believe my own
s! I must have looked a sketch." Here Miss Thong laughed heartily
ierself. "Didn't you think I did, Miss Longstaff? Never mind, so
you, when you came on as that little girl in the choir. That was a
, that was. Laugh!—you ought to have heard me. And that Mr.
nn—he's a comic, if you like. The way he went on telling every-
ly they was late! And then betting five pounds with that other
—who was it?—that fine sing-ger—yes, that's him—Mr. Brundit—
that was good! And that Miss Susie Dean! Isn't she a card? The
y she took people off! Really enjoying herself, she was, you could
just by looking at her. So pretty too! And what high spirits! Now
n't you go and be jealous, Miss Longstaff, because I'll say the same
you. I'm not going to quarrel with the prettiest customer I've got,
l a real famous actress too—no, no, no!" And Miss Thong cocked
head on one side, looked very arch and very cunning at one and
same time, and then laughed at herself so heartily that she burst
o a fit of coughing and hastily put a handkerchief to her mouth.

Miss Trant stared out of the window a minute, then said: "I'm
d you enjoyed the show so much, Miss Thong. At least, I imagine
u did," she added, with a smile.

I haven't enjoyed anything so much, I don't know when," cried
ss Thong. "I went twice—did I tell you? It's not usual for me to
even once, but twice—then it's got to be extra special. I said to
—he doesn't like me going out much, you know—but I said to him
know I'm very busy,' I said, 'and I know it costs money. But I
ust go again,' I said, 'because they're so good they've taken me right
: of myself, what with their sing-ging and lovely dancing and their
nics and all,' I said. And when I heard they'd gone and broken
—oh, the news soon gets round in Rawsley!—well, I could have sat
wn and cried. And then Miss Longstaff told me how they'd been
ated, Miss What's it—Miss Trant, I beg your pardon. 'What a shame!'
aid. There I'd been sitting here, thinking how lovely they looked
d trying to hum some of the songs and telling myself they hadn't

a care in the world, and there they were all feeling as miserable as a thing, not knowing where to look, you might say, and me here with nice little business. And that only made me feel more miserable. know how you can get sometimes?" And Miss Thong laughed ag "But to think that you're beginning all over again!"

"And going to be better," said Elsie. "We've got two good new me

"Just fancy!" cried Miss Thong delightedly. "It just shows y doesn't it? You never know what's waiting round the corner, a tell Pa. He'll never believe in anything. Oh, these business men say! He never would believe we'd get this house. But here we And isn't it nice here, Miss Trant?" She almost pushed them b over to the window with her. They looked out at the bald turf, half bricks and tin cans, the huddle of box lids and wire netting hens.

"Very nice," said Miss Trant. Then, with an effort: "Very indeed."

"Isn't it?" cried Miss Thong. "It's so open. You're in the town yet *not* in it, I say. Especially up here, looking right out. That's wh all the boys down the street play—cricket and football—and thou they're a bit noisy, I don't mind it—quite cheers you up to see th running about and hear them shouting. It's a bit of life, isn't it? glad you think it's nice here. It's made such a difference to me hav such a lookout. What with this house and the dressmaking doing well, they'll be telling me soon I'm getting above myself. Perhap am, what with actresses coming too, eh, Miss Longstaff? Someb said to me, the other day, when I told them, they said 'You'll be go on the stage yourself next, Miss Thong.' 'And a fine sketch I'd loo I said." Here Miss Thong laughed and coughed again, and E laughed a little too, and Miss Trant tried to laugh, but found it ea to turn away and undo the parcels they had brought with them.

They told her what they wanted, and she frowned and gasped questions and nodded excitedly and busied herself clearing the w table. "There, you can go away," she cried to the vanishing pieces material, "and so can you, and you, and you. Coat and skirt—b serge and braid—for Mrs. Moxon—that's the last of you for a bit I don't care if you *are* promised. Semi-evening for Miss Abbey—wa or whist-drives—and *you'll* have to wait. Yes, I'll do it for you, Miss nt, Miss Longstaff, but don't—oh, don't—breathe a word to any one Rawsley I'm doing it, or my custom's gone! You see, I've promised d promised and better promised—and they come round and ask and —just as if a girl had twelve pairs of hands. But I'll do it for u. I don't care. They can all wait, that's what I say." The little oked creature grasped the edge of her table, stood as erect as she ıld, and, with cheeks paler than ever but with her great nose flushg triumphantly, she seemed to defy a host of clamouring Moxons and beys, coats and skirts and semi-evenings. "So there you are," she ed. "If I've to lock myself in this room, give out I'm ill again, I'll it. Let's have a bit of life, I say. Now tell me what you want d show me what you've got."

'We want a harlequin effect in some of the dresses," said Elsie. 'e've got all sorts of remnants and lovely odd bits. Look here. teens and light silks and crêpe-de-Chine and velvet." And the next nute, the worktable had disappeared, and in its place was a crazy rden of fabrics, a rainbow carnival.

'Oh, I say! O-o-oh!" After this first rapturous cry, Miss Thong eathed hard, quivered with delight, pressed her hands together, and red and stared, as if her eyes had long been thirsty and could at last ink their fill. Then she fell upon the glowing heap. "Oh, look this—and this—and these two together," she babbled ecstatically. Iere's some apricot velvet—lovely cap it would make, wouldn't it? nd that old rose—let me smooth it out—look!—put that with it— ıit till I get some pins—hundreds of pins—oh, aren't I silly?"

"I was like that the other day," said Miss Trant, laughing.

"I'm always like that," said Elsie, who was indeed nearly as excited Miss Thong. "They go to my head, I can tell you. Look at that, iss Thong. Isn't it lovely?"

"Isn't it! Oh, deary dear! It's all lovely, and I don't know where start or whether I'm on my head or my heels or laughing or crying, don't really. Now aren't I silly?" And it certainly looked as if someing dreadful would happen to Miss Thong, who was trying to laugh ıd cough and blow her nose and pick up some of the silks and fill her outh with pins all at the same time. At last, however, she quietened down, the professional dressmaker taking the place of the enraptu woman, and they discussed the dresses they wanted. It was arranged t Elsie should help her when she was not wanted for rehearsal, during remaining two days at Rawsley.

It was Wednesday evening when Miss Trant called there again. T thin little house, now beseiged by the curiously melancholy dusk of tumn, that smoky blue into which the green and gold of summer vanished, it seems, for ever, looked forlorn enough, but its glazed brig ness had gone and there was something cheerful and brave, a hint the indomitable, about that lighted upstairs window. Elsie was th looking very pink and rounded and robust by the side of Miss Tho who in the searching gaslight seemed frailer and uglier than bef like a worn-out witch, with that great nose and her dimmed eyes pe ing between their reddened lids. She was obviously tired out, yet gree Miss Trant triumphantly. Two dresses were completed.

"And Miss Longstaff's is one of them," she began.

"Elsie, I told you," said that young lady.

"There now!" she cried to Miss Trant, nodding her head. "She wa me to call her Elsie. Aren't I getting on? And it seems only a min since I saw her on the stage. Well then, Elsie's is finished and it's loveliest thing you ever saw, Miss Trant, it really is. Do put it Elsie. Slip into my bed-room and put it on. Just to please me."

After an interrogative glance at Miss Trant, Elsie nodded, went o and returned in an incredibly short space of time an entirely differ person. In that soft shimmer of blues and greens she looked alm beautiful.

"But what a lovely dress you've made!" cried Miss Trant with genui enthusiasm. "It's like a wood full of bluebells." She turned to M Thong to congratulate her.

But Miss Thong's gaze was still fastened mistily upon Elsie. Her li were quivering a little, and her long clever hands were clutching a twisting. "Oh—Miss—Miss—Elsie," she faltered, moving a step or so wards her. "You do look beautiful in it. And I made it, didn't I? A to think of you—wearing it—sing-ging and dancing in it—going all o —thousands of people. Oh, I am silly—but—just to think ——"

Elsie put an arm about her, held her for a moment, then stooped a ıtly kissed her on the cheek. "You're not silly, you're very clever," said softly. "There. Isn't she clever, Miss Trant? We shall have ɔut her name on the programmes, won't we? Dresses by Madame ɔng of Rawsley."

Oh, go on with you," gasped Miss Thong, dabbing at her eyes and ghing and crying. "I really must be tired. I don't know when I've en on so. You must be thinking 'She's a ridiculous little thing.' w aren't you? Never mind, we're all a bit silly sometimes. Best ıg I can do is to put in a bit at Mrs. Moxon's coat and skirt, that'll ıg me to my senses. Two yards of braid to put on, plenty of machin-, that's what I want. There now, let's talk about the other things."

o they settled down to talk about the other dresses and were very busi-s-like. It was when Miss Thong began to discuss sending them on l to ask about addresses that Miss Trant, who was moved by the ught of their leaving this little woman and never seeing her again, l an inspiration.

Tomorrow morning, you know," she began, "we leave for a place led Dotworth——"

That's the three-night stand I told you about," Elsie put in, nodding Miss Thong.

And then next week we go to a seaside place on the East Coast called ıdybay," Miss Trant continued. "Now if all the dresses will be fin-ed by about next Monday or Tuesday, why don't you bring them ırself—you needn't carry them, you know; we can arrange about that ınd then you can try them on."

'And I could see you all on the stage too, couldn't I?" cried Miss Thong gerly, her face lighting up.

"Of course you could. And it would be a nice little holiday for you ɔ, after all your hard work. You could stay a day or two."

"Oh, wouldn't that be lovely! Going to the seaside and trying on e dresses and seeing them on the stage perhaps and hearing it all again d better than last time and—oh—everything!" For a moment she saw all, fastened on it in pure rapture. Then the light died out of her ce. "But I couldn't do it, Miss Trant. Oh, I wish I could, but I really ıuldn't."

"Why not?"

"Oh!—so many things. There's—I don't know—I couldn't begin think of it."

"Of course we should pay your expenses," said Miss Trant casu "Naturally, when you're working for us. It's the usual thing, isn' Elsie?"

"Done every time," replied Elsie promptly and with a grateful gla at Miss Trant. Then she looked severely at Miss Thong. "Now yo being really silly. I don't believe you want to see me in my dress. Y come along. I'll get you in my digs."

"Yes, of course, Elsie, Miss Trant, I know—but—oh, don't ask There's Pa. He'd never let me go, I know he wouldn't."

"Where is he? Is he in now? Downstairs? All right, you le him to me," said Elsie grimly. "If it's only Pa that's bothering y I'll soon settle Pa."

And off she went, there and then, leaving Miss Thong—as she mitted—"downright flabbergasted." It took Elsie exactly five minute settle Pa, and there could be no doubt—as a glance at her face prom informed them—that on this question the Midland Guardian was set once and for all.

"And didn't he mind then?" cried Miss Thong in wonder and deli

"Not a bit," said Elsie, still grimly. "He liked it. And he'll keep liking it."

"Well, I'll come then. Yes, I will. I'll work and work and get th all finished and I'll bring them. I know there's an excursion from h to Sandybay—four days or something—and that'll make it cheaper. don't know how I'll get all the dresses to the station."

"I do," said Elsie. "Pa will take them."

"And I shall be able to come in and see you all for nothing, wo I?" cried Miss Thong. "And perhaps go behind the scenes."

"Of course! Madame Thong, dressmaker to *The Good Companion* said Elsie. "Can't we put it in the programmes, Miss Trant?"

"We can and we will," she replied, rising. "We must finish mak the arrangements now. I've still got heaps and heaps of things to I wondered at first how I should find anything to do, but now I se to be busy from the crack of dawn."

"I'm sure you like it, don't you, Miss Trant?" said Miss Thong. "

t of life, isn't it? That's what I feel about doing these dresses. Give a bit of life, I say."

nd that was one of the things Miss Trant did not forget.

II

as very exciting being at last on the move. She took with her in the Jimmy Nunn and Mr. Oakroyd, setting off very early so that these would have an opportunity of putting the stage in order, for the they were using at Dotworth, known as the Olympic, was a picture tre. The others came on later, by train. On the way, she tried to be cool about it all, told herself that it was, of course, a most absurd c, but nevertheless she was very excited. And that night she would the party—*her* party—how ridiculous that sounded!—on the stage, ng before an audience, for the first time. Just before they arrived e she had to make a confession.

ou know, I feel thrilled already," she told Jimmy.

e was rather troubled about this. "Not that I don't understand; I he said. "I don't care if a man's been fifty years in the business, e's the same old thrill comes back. Opening night—all of a doodah! ow. I've had some opening nights in my time. It's that as much as hing that ruins a man's digestion."

sn't yours any better?"

etter! Worse and worse! Believe me, I've nearly forgotten the mo- s of eating. A knife and fork worries me. I ate so little at Rawsley even the landlady complained, said it was putting her off her own , and her husband came to see me one night and got quite nasty it it, said their food was as good as anybody else's, and he was tired ating my meals cold or warmed-up and being called a glutton by missis into the bargain. But what I wanted to say is this. Don't ct anything here, Miss Trant."

hat haven't I to expect?"

nything at all," he replied promptly. "The show's not in shape yet. Dotworth isn't a real date. I know the place; played it once before, s ago. It's a dud. All we're doing, Miss Trant, is trying it on the "

nd Dotworth looked rather like a dog: "One of those forlorn yellow little mongrels," Miss Trant told herself. In the faint sunlight the l town looked yellowish, and there was something forlorn about the str through which they were passing.

The Olympic was a very small place, sandwiched between an i monger's and a draper's. On a board in front was pasted one of t new bills. There it was—*The Good Companions*—in bold letter The sight of it gave Miss Trant a sense of achievement that was pleasant.

"But look at that," groaned Jimmy, pointing, "just look at it, I you."

Undoubtedly the bill was not very impressive. It suffered because derneath it was a highly coloured poster of a film. This poster sho several pairs of legs, apparently supporting *The Good Companions'* and underneath these legs were letters of flame that said: *A Drama f the very Depths of the Soul.*

"That's what they do to you in these one-eyed holes," said Jim "You'll have to cover that poster up, Oakroyd."

Miss Trant had never heard of a "one-eyed hole" before, but the kept popping up in her mind during the afternoon and early even when she was busy running round Dotworth, going from the st to the Olympic, from the Olympic to her hotel. Dotworth certainly a one-eyed hole, and by the time the doors of the Olympic were ope she was convinced that that solitary eye would not be fixed upon *Good Companions.* It was not the first time she had been anxious a the size of an audience, for she had helped at charity concerts and like at Hitherton, but she had never felt so anxious before. When saw the doors open and people walking past them, she positively wi But if the people went in, she was not happy about them but was wondering if they would enjoy it. Before the curtain went up, she able to count the audience. There were ninety-three altogether; tw in the one-and-tenpenny seats; thirty-seven in the one-and-twopenny (but these included ten free passes for people exhibiting bills): and remaining forty-four were ninepennies at the back. She tried to little mental arithmetic but was not successful, so she called it pounds and reminded herself that these next three performances c only be considered dress rehearsals.

’m not gone on these ’ere pierrots,” she heard somebody say. “Give
pitchers.” Then, a minute later, the same voice went on: “That
o. Just what I’ve said many a time, many and many a time.”
woman cleared her throat mournfully. “Give me pitchers.”

iss Trant felt like giving her a box on the ears. Pictures indeed!
tingling, she sat down at the very end of one of the one-and-tenpenny
s, having agreed that for this first night she must keep in front.
great moment arrived. No footlights suddenly and beautifully il-
inated the curtain, for there were no footlights. The stage was
ted from above, and now these lights were switched on and those
he body of the hall turned off. There came the thrilling sound of a
g, then the crash of a chord or two, followed by a run, on the piano.
curtain rose about a foot, hesitated, wobbled, then rose another six
es, then stopped—to reveal several agitated pairs of legs. There
some agonised whispering. Then a voice spoke out from the wings
esperation. “Nay,” it said, “shoo won’t budge an inch.”

here was some clapping and jeering at the back.

h-sh,” cried Miss Trant fiercely, turning round.

he curtain began wobbling again; jerked up another few inches;
ped again; then suddenly ran up at full speed, presenting the
ence with a splendid view of Jimmy Nunn’s back. But that gentle-
was equal to the occasion. He did not run off but coolly turned
d, made a face at the audience, and said: “Oh, you’re here, are
? Couldn’t make out where you’d got to. I’ll call the others. They’d
to see you.” And he put two fingers to his mouth and whistled,
Inigo at the piano a nod, sat himself down behind the drums, and
crashed into the opening chorus. It was superbly done. Miss Trant
as if she had just tobogganed over a chasm. She had not been so
ted about anything for years.

was very odd and amusing seeing her new friends on the stage.
had never known any professionals before, and it was quite different
n watching amateurs. When you saw people you knew acting with
teur dramatic societies, they were merely themselves with parts stuck
o them: Mrs. Corvison pretended to be a maid, and Major Thomp-
wore a wig and butler’s clothes—and that was all. But with these
essionals, you lost all sight of the private personalities; they simply

came to life on the stage in another sort of way; and as you watc them, you could hardly believe that you really knew them as peo Jimmy Nunn, for example, was all drollery; he had an entirely voice, very queer and squeaky; and the man she knew who had b so worried about percentages and his digestion completely disappea Mr. Jerningham, whose dancing was so astonishing, became a vivid sonality. Mr. Mitcham was immensely dignified and impressive, when he was repeatedly contradicted and fooled by Jimmy and preten to lose his temper, he seemed like an outraged ambassador. Elsie peared to be ten years younger, and frivolity itself; though her st personality appealed to Miss Trant rather less than her real one. E the Brundits, whose singing interested Miss Trant less than any ot part of the performance, simply because she had heard much better si ing of this kind all her life, at least contrived to be imposing figu Mrs. Joe swam down the stage like a Queen of Song, and acknowled any applause that came her way with the air of a duchess openin charity bazaar. And Joe, when he was busy "feeding" Jimmy, co say "Well, I'll bet you a fiver, old man," and produce a crumpled of newspaper, quite in the manner of a gentleman whose pockets stuffed with fivers. As for Susie, who was best of all, she did not chan she was still her delightful self: but she seemed enlarged and intensi in this new atmosphere; she treated the stage as if it were her own he rug and the audience as if it were composed of old friends atten her birthday party. Everything she did was deliciously absurd. sang ordinary sentimental little music-hall songs, and by letting her v slide down and down, by catching her breath at awkward moments, a droll flick of a glance, she turned them inside out and then tossed th away with an easy scorn. Her dancing itself was a delicate parody, a comment on Elsie and Jerry Jerningham. And then she contrived to lightning sketches of all manner of people; just a phrase or two, a w a gesture, a grimace, and you were reminded at once of somebody sol and ridiculous you had known; if she only had to cross the stage, would do it in character or caricature, and you had to laugh; she always being somebody and yet she was always Susie too, for you w always conscious of the girl herself, with her dark eyes and tilted n her rather square shoulders, her sturdy figure. Unlike Jimmy Nunn, ıot seem to give you a set performance; her acting was a kind of romping, an overflow of high spirits; and it was all essentially ıine—"Aren't they *absurd,* my dear?" it seemed to say; and Miss t, who remembered so well the times she had felt like that, but do nothing but bottle it up, adored her. The fact that Dotworth ntly thought the girl an amateurish trifler, who ought to learn to a luscious ballad or redden her nose and be really funny, only stif- Miss Trant's allegiance and fed the flame of her enthusiasm. Oh, l been worth it just for Susie! This girl *had* to go on and on, that ertain.

ıen the final curtain came, the applause was only half-hearted. Miss stood up and clapped fiercely. There was the company, *her* com- and her friends, who had worked so hard all the evening and the week before this evening; there they were, smiling—for the cur- ıad risen again just to let them smile—and these poor Dotworth res could only stare or go poking about for their hats. It was not Miss Trant clapped harder than ever, and then, when the lights on, there was some staring in her direction, but she did not care. ıst, one Miss Trant did not care, even if the other did—for now seemed to be two of her.

re was the Miss Trant who had been growing up so quickly ever she left Hitherton. It was this Miss Trant who had so suddenly, klessly, so absurdly decided to run the Concert Party, who had ed into this shabby and adventurous world of minor theatres and far enjoyed every moment it had offered her, who had become nately concerned with dates and rentals and seating and production ers and costumes, who had already plucked out of this dingy ness of lodgings, makeshift theatres, and dull little towns, the fine s of work and comradeship and loyalty. But there still remained iss Trant who had lived so long at the Old Hall, Hitherton, the n who had arrived in her middle thirties in a very different world, hich none of her new companions, except perhaps Inigo Jollifant, ever have found their way; a world full of people who would see ttle difference between travelling round with a concert party and g in the streets. It would be idle to pretend that this Miss Trant een banished for ever almost at a moment's notice. She was there in the background, wondering and sometimes wincing. She was re to point out that this was all very well perhaps for a week or t frolic, while they were moving obscurely in little towns, but that so or later the two worlds must clash and then there would probabl a catastrophe in one of them. She had her hour when there cam reply from Mr. Truby of Cheltenham, the solicitor, who had had t told something of what was happening so that he could make arra ments with the bank about forwarding money. Mr. Truby had re that he would do his best to carry out her instructions and did not a pate any difficulty; he was as solemnly courteous as ever and showe trace of surprise; yet there was that in his letter which announced in e that Mr. Truby was ready to carry out the wishes of any clients no m how monstrous they might be, until such time as he received a me certificate proving their insanity. And that was only a beginning. soon there must come a real test—and what would happen then? C this tiny fantastic army of pierrots withstand the massed forces of H ton? Those forces could act through the glance of amazement, the eyebrows, the horrified remonstrances, of a single person; and Miss T was aware of the fact, though she had not the least idea who the p might be.

She had not long to wait for either the test or the person. They a together, on the Wednesday afternoon of the following week, at S bay.

III

Dotworth had been a failure: they had made neither friends nor n there, and they had all been glad to leave the place. They would make a start, they told one another, at Sandybay, which some of knew and proclaimed to be “not a bad date.” Miss Trant had heard of it before, but then she knew very little about the East It was certainly very pleasant after Rawsley and Dotworth, for a clean friendly little town, open to salt winds that as yet only healthy chill in them. In the mornings, when the October sun str through, there was a fine sparkle on the sea, the air was as cri sweet as an apple, and it was delightful to swing along the prom In the centre, the old part, Sandybay was still a fishing village, a f higgledy-piggledy of boats, nets, capstans, blue jerseys, mahogany s, and queer inns. On the outskirts, it was a residential town; it had ıg of little villas and two golf courses; and retired army officers and ict commissioners abounded there, battling with weeds in the morn- trying a niblick in the afternoon, and bidding a quite unjustified ee No Trumps in the evening. In the spaces between these out- s and the old fishing village, Sandybay was a growing but still ct" resort; and here you found the Beach Hotel, the Sandringham ding House, the Old Oak Café, the Elite Picture Theatre, Eastman's ulating Library, the Municipal Bandstand and Floral Gardens, and Pier. This Pier went forward about twenty-five yards, then swelled n a rather dropsical fashion to support a Pavilion, which looked like vergrown and neglected greenhouse. However, it boasted a stage pped with footlights, a spot-light, and an excellent curtain, a grand and several dressing-rooms for artistes, and seating accommodation x hundred people. After achieving this Pavilion, the Pier went on for about a hundred yards and ended in a subdued riot of little s and automatic machines, the whole dominated by the Refresh- Room, where the very red-faced men who took out monthly angling s could obtain a little Scotch or Draught Bass. It is perhaps worth king, in passing, that our friend Mr. Morton Mitcham had made efreshment Room his headquarters and had become a great fav- with both the staff (one blonde and one brunette) and the patrons, included in their number two gentlemen who were nearly sure r some prompting—that they had seen Mr. Mitcham before, one gapore in Nought Three, the other in Sydney in Nought Eight. litcham himself declared more than once that he remembered them very well, and they were all very happy together.

vas the manager of the Pier who had engaged *The Good Com- ns* (on a sixty-per-cent basis, with a thirty-pound guarantee), for bay was trying to extend its season until the end of October and romised its visitors a "First-class Concert Party every week in the Pavilion" throughout the month. The fact that *The Good Com- ns* had found it ridiculously easy to find lodgings (with sitting- wildly thrown in) suggested there had not been any rush of l holiday-makers during this second week of October. And so far,

that is, on Monday and Tuesday evenings, the attendances had b
poor. Jimmy Nunn said there were plenty of people in the town, enou
to give them a full house every night, but that they had no inclinat
to walk out to the Pier Pavilion. Miss Trant agreed with him. T
town was bright enough in the morning, lit by the huge flickering g
of the sea, but by tea-time this brightness had faded, the waters w
ghostly, the waves came lapping in melancholy, and the even
twice accompanied by a drizzle of rain, was forlorn indeed, and th
was nothing more forlorn in it than the echoing length of the P
A cosy theatre of the old-fashioned kind, all gilt and crimson pl
stuffy and glittering, would have been proof against such evenings,
this Pavilion, like nothing but a huge decayed conservatory, was h
less before the mournful mystery of the autumnal darkness and the m
of the sea. But there was time yet, they told one another; the
of the week was always better than the beginning.

Miss Trant had had an early lunch on this Wednesday so that
could see what was happening in the Pavilion, where Mr. Oakroyd
sisted by Joe (who was not a bad hand with a paint brush), was ma
a little "set" for a new production-number-cum-sketch devised by Ji
Nunn. This "set" showed the exterior of a cottage and consisted
practicable door and window and a few square feet of painted ca
at each side. Mr. Oakroyd and Joe had nearly finished and were
sitting in their shirt-sleeves triumphantly refreshing themselves wi
bottle of beer and large sandwiches. Inigo and Jimmy Nunn were a
piano, trying over a new song. Miss Trant walked through the
torium and then stopped in the centre gangway, near the end o
third row of front seats, to examine the "set," which was proppe
drying, at one side of the stage. She had just congratulated the
craftsmen, who were very proud of themselves, and was thinking
fun it was to be able to have things like that made, merely to ha
excuse to return happily to the play of the nursery, when the Pa
attendant, a man with one eye and a long melancholy face, came
her and said: "There's a lady askin' for yer, Miss Trant."

"Who is it?" She was puzzled.

"I dunno, Miss," he replied, looking at her sadly with his singl
"She wouldn't give no name."

Vell, ask her to come in here then, please," she said, and exchanged w more remarks with the craftsmen on the stage. Then she looked id. Somebody had just entered the Pavilion, was approaching her. as her sister Hilda, and the very last person she wished to see at that nent.

far Hilda has only entered this chronicle in the conversation of her ew Hilary, who reported that she was "frightfully down on" the that he should spend his time with *The Static*. For the last fifteen s she has been the wife of Lawrence Newent, of Porchison, Newent Porchison, solicitors; the excellent mother of his two children and equally excellent ruler of his household in Cadogan Place. She is unlike our Miss Trant in appearance, but shorter and stouter and ier; is actually six years older but looks ten. As a wife, a mother, stress of the house, she is a sensible and capable woman; it is only social being, a member of society, or rather two societies, for she is ys leaving one and struggling into another, that she is somewhat ılous. In her time she has been the victim of many passing en-ısms and cults, but it is obvious that though they might necessitate aluation of the whole universe (there was Theosophy, for example) never at their maddest urge came within a thousand miles of manag- pierrot troupe. But for the last twenty years, she has alternately emned her sister Elizabeth for holding herself in too much and for ng to break out. During the last years of their father's life she did esitate to say that Elizabeth had been foolish enough to allow herself submerged. At this moment—and it is written in her eyes as she aches—she thinks the girl had emerged, broken out, with a venge-

ey kissed. "But, Hilda"—and Miss Trant gave a short nervous —"what a surprise!"

ı't it?" said Hilda, rather vaguely. She was busy looking about "They told me I should find you here." Her glance rested on s lock of hair, on Jimmy's puckered shining face above the piano, e's shirt-sleeves, on Mr. Oakroyd's sandwich and bottle of beer. when her eyes returned to meet her sister's, all these things had quietly extinguished or at least removed a great distance.

w did you find me?" Miss Trant asked quickly.

"Truby told me," Hilda replied. "He wrote. He seemed to th it was his duty to write, that we ought to know. And I agree."

"Well, I think it was rather impertinent of him," cried Miss Trant. was no duty of his at all. I'm sure that's not the way Lawrence tr his clients. Not that I really mind, of course."

"Naturally. Unless, of course, you didn't want us to know."

Miss Trant coloured. "That's absurd. I should have told you my I've had no opportunity yet, really. I've been so busy. Honestly, Hi I've never been so busy before. You've no idea what a lot there is to

Hilda closed her eyes, an old trick of hers, effective for once bec it seemed to remove still further the shirt-sleeves and bottles of be

"But tell me," Miss Trant went on, "how you came to find me he

"I wired to Truby and he told me where you were. Then I c down the moment I could. It was fearfully inconvenient putting e thing off today—you know what it's like in town now, the awful —but I simply had to come. Lawrence wanted to come himself. first, when he heard about it, he laughed—exercising his precious of humour, as usual—but he soon saw it wasn't particularly funny, he wanted to come because he thought you'd probably been encour to sign some perfectly iniquitous contract or other and would los your money. He says this business is full of the most awful swin and he knows all about these things. So he wanted to come hi and get you out of it, he said. But I told him I must see you m first. There was quite a good train from Liverpool Street, and of course it didn't take me long to guess they would know some about you here. So there you have it, Elizabeth."

"I see," said Miss Trant slowly. Then she suddenly smiled and li touched her sister on the arm. "Well, Hilda, I'm very pleased t you."

There was a silence between them. From the piano there came tum-tum-tumming. From the other side of the stage came the of Mr. Oakroyd, rather muffled with sandwich, saying very con tially: "I'll tell tha what it is, Joe. Ale you get from t'wood's bad naradays, but this 'ere bottled stuff's nowt but fizz, blaws you up balloon."

Hilda sent a glance of despair towards the stage, then moved n the gangway. Miss Trant followed her, and together they walked ne entrance, where they stopped.

Now, my dear," cried Miss Trant, "I can see you're nearly bursting. begin."

ınd I can see you're ready to fly into a temper and talk all kinds onsense," replied Hilda good-humouredly. "And I refuse to have a rel in this absurd place, it would be too ridiculous." Then she looked e. "But I must say something."

Vell, say it, Hilda, say it at once."

ut, my dear, you must admit I have a right to know. You might ıst have told me. What I can't understand is how on earth you came mixed up with these people at all. The last time I heard from you were down at Hitherton furnishing the Cottage and arranging the Hall. Then the next thing I hear—and from Truby of all e—is that you're wandering round the country with a lot of wretched ɔts. It's too absurd. Just as if you were a little stage-struck girl! did it happen?"

ss Trant told her, as best she could, how it happened, giving a very sketch of her adventures since she left Hitherton.

nd I suppose it is rather absurd," she admitted, in conclusion. "But an't always be sensible, can one? After all, you've always done the of things you wanted to do, you know, Hilda. And this is some- to do, and it's fun, and it isn't doing anybody any harm, in fact ɔing all kinds of people some good, me included."

n not at all sure about that," said Hilda.

ım," said her sister decisively.

da stared at her and was silent for a moment. She gave the im- on that she was deciding to change her course of action, discarding ɔle set of remonstrances and appeals. "Well, Elizabeth," she said , quietly, "I'm not going to be the tremendous elder sister and all st of it. I'm not going to pretend to be an old-fashioned snob. I remind you what Father would have thought of this——" She saw ster smile, and went on hastily: "Yes, I know. He didn't ap- of some of the things I used to do. I'll admit we shall have to him out because he hardly approved of anything that wasn't abso- Victoria and Albert. But nobody has ever called me stodgy, have they? I'm not stuffy about the theatre and theatrical people. I've r them at parties—the successful ones, I mean—and I've invited them r self, and I'll admit I've been glad to see them and meet them. Eve body is, nowadays, except a few old freaks. But this sort of thing simply shabby and fourth rate. It's nothing but a crowd of beery m and common little girls trailing round from one dirty set of lodgings another, living in the most awful kind of way on about twopenc week ——"

"Splendid, Hilda!" cried Miss Trant. "I never knew you were such orator. I don't agree with you, but go on."

"Well, you must admit, my dear, there isn't one of these people y dream of asking in even for a cup of tea at Hitherton."

"I don't admit it. And even if I did, it doesn't prove anything refuse to regulate everything by what I might do at Hitherton. had rather a lot of Hitherton, you know," she added, and in a ton voice that helped Hilda to remember that she herself had taken car have very little of Hitherton.

"Oh, I know you had a dull and rather awful time there," cried H rather plaintively. "And you know that I didn't mind at all abou the money and everything coming to you."

"Of course, my dear. You needn't tell me that."

"Both Lawrence and I were glad, and we were hoping you w come and stay with us for some time and meet people and per settle in town if you wanted to. I'd made all sorts of plans, E beth ——"

"I'm very sorry to have upset your plans, Hilda."

"No, don't be absurd. But you must see that you can't possib on with this crazy scheme. If it were something decent, I wou mind—though you must admit you don't know anything about bu —but this is too ridiculous. To begin with, it's too dingy and futi words. Then you don't know anything about this sort of thing."

"Well, I didn't, certainly. But I'm learning. And it's great fu like it."

"And, as Lawrence says, these pierrot people are probably robbin right and left, just living on you and laughing at you behind back."

No they're not," replied Miss Trant warmly. "That's certainly not e. They're very grateful—and—and loyal—and awfully hard-working. ey're just as honest and decent as any of the people I've known. The y difference is—they're more amusing."

For a time perhaps, that's all."

That may be. Perhaps one can only settle down with the kind of ple one's always known, and been brought up with, but then I'm settling down, I'm having a change. You see, I wanted something do, and now I'm doing it. I'm quite willing to admit that I may get d of this life pretty soon, but until I do I intend to go on with it, inish my little adventure. So there you are, Hilda!"

Oh, but don't you see——!" She was exasperated now. "It's just talking to one of the children, it really is. Don't you see that any-g might happen while you're going on like this? We can't have wandering round all winter staying in the most dreadful places, by self, without a single person near you could trust to be sensible. d not only that, but what's going to happen to your money? You ht easily lose every penny. It's monstrous, Elizabeth. Now hon-, have you made any money so far?"

Not a ha'penny," Miss Trant replied cheerfully.

There you are!" Hilda was triumphant. "You haven't, and you r will. I expect they're all hopeless, these people, or they wouldn't been stranded like that."

No, they're not. Some of them are really clever, far too good for udiences they're having. They really are, Hilda. Stay and see the e hesitated, then brought it out bravely—"the show tonight." She hed. "I'll give you a free pass, just as if you had exhibited one of bills in your shop window."

No, that's not funny, Elizabeth," Hilda snapped. "And I can't stay ght, and even if I could, I wouldn't. The whole thing's perfectly strous. Look at those people in there! You know very well you felt mfortable the moment I set eyes on them. *Good Companions* in-! And all the time you're spending your money to keep these e creatures in—in—beer. And they're laughing at you, knowing well they don't even need audiences when they've got you to fatten And you could be doing so much now, staying with us and meeting

the right kind of people, interesting men, and—oh—everything. I'd
to know how much money you've thrown away already."

"Well, I don't propose to tell you, Hilda."

"If you'd made some money out of it, that would be the tiniest ex
for going on," cried Hilda, who plainly held, however, that it w
really be no excuse at all, and was only using the first argument
came to hand. "As it is, there's no excuse."

"That's where you are wrong," said Miss Trant eagerly. "It se
to me all the more reason for my sticking to them. I'm far keener a
it now than I was a week ago. We went to a place called Dotwor
a most deadly little town—and lost money there. Yes, it was a com
fiasco, I admit it. And after that, I told myself I wouldn't give u
anything, not until we were really successful. Can't you imagine
I feel about it, Hilda? I really like these pierrots—you'd like som
them too—and I think they like me and hate the thought of my l
money, and I should hate myself for ever if I ran away now and let
down. Besides, I should despise myself just for running away, thro
all the adventure away just to feel safe and comfortable, just be
a few people might be shocked."

"You're getting angry and excited now, my dear," cried Hilda, ra
her voice. "I knew you would. And I knew you'd be absurd and
born about it. You stuck down there at Hitherton, wouldn't move
now of course the minute you feel yourself free, you must go an
something absolutely senseless. Yes, wickedly senseless!" There
tears of vexation in her eyes. "If you want to do something, hav
ventures, as you call it, there are plenty of things you could do that
be worth doing and wouldn't make you and the rest of us simply l
ing-stocks. It's all so silly and useless. There couldn't be anything
Singing old music-hall songs and joggling at the knees and rep
stale jokes! Going round making shopgirls giggle! Cadging six
from butchers' boys! And you of all people, Elizabeth! It's per
incredible. And you might be meeting men you could marry, i
of hobnobbing with broken-down actors in awful places like this

"I don't want to marry. And please stop, Hilda." Miss Tran
not flushed now but pale. For the moment she could not sta
against this vehemence, in which there was real cutting scorn. Sh

grave disadvantage because she was still open to all the attack and l not produce a defence that she knew existed. It was not merely Hilda would not understand her motives, but that she did not y understand them herself. They came from obscure but vital needs, desires that had vanished underground, like the limestone counivers, in girlhood. She did not know herself why there was some- strangely satisfying about this life of dancing and singing and tinsel limelight and odd journeys. She knew it was good to be full of , to be responsible, to be the comrade, perhaps the leader, of these le creatures of the stage, but the rest she could not explain. So, ne moment, she was dumb, helpless.

lda saw her advantage but halted for a breathing-space before she ed it home. And she was too late.

h, Miss Trant!" cried a voice.

hy, Miss Thong!" said Miss Trant delightedly. "I'm so glad."

s, isn't it nice? And what a journey! But here I am, with the s all ready. We've brought them too, you see. Elsie carried most, urse. Oh, but I'm interrupting, aren't I? I'm sorry, I'm sure. know what I am, I get carried away."

s all right," said Miss Trant, smiling at her. "This is my sister, Newent. And this is Miss Thong, who has been making some tely wonderful dresses for us."

ry pleased to meet you, I'm sure," cried Miss Thong, who was ng about in an ecstasy. "Though if I'm fit to meet anybody or o be seen, I shall be surprised, I shall indeed. What with working dresses and putting people off and smoothing Pa down and packp and the long railway ride and meeting Elsie at the station and the sea—well, well——" She began coughing, wrestled desly, and gasped out her apologies to Hilda, who could not help at the queer rickety little mortal. "There, if that doesn't just me right," she concluded cheerfully. "That's me all over. Talk, et excited, won't let others get a word in edgeways, then I land ! Miss Trant'll tell you how silly I am, Mrs. Newark."

must go into the Pavilion and look at the dresses," said Miss "Unless you're too tired, Miss Thong, and would rather wait."

ouldn't wait a single minute. I said to Elsie, 'Just take me to

Miss Trant and let her see the dresses or I shan't rest,' I said, 'or
like being here under false pretences,' I said, didn't I, Elsie? Wher
she? She must have taken them in, all but these. Yes, do let's go
Are you interested in these stage dresses, Mrs. Newark? I'm sure
are, being Miss Trant's sister, and then having such nice taste your
You don't mind me saying that, do you? I know it's rather pers
coming from a stranger, but us dressmakers we can't help noticing,
know. I see in a minute. 'She knows what's nice,' I say to my
'London style and good,' I said to myself the very moment I saw
Mrs. Newark. You're sure you don't mind? I don't know what I sh
say before the day's out, and that's the state I'm in. Doesn't the air
good? Can't you feel it going inside you?"

"I've only just arrived myself," said Hilda. "But the air does
good here, I must say."

"Doesn't it?" cried Miss Thong, with so much enthusiasm that the
of them might have been arguing for hours and have only just reach
triumphant concordance. "That's exactly what I say. I felt the b
of it as soon as I set foot outside the station. Elsie laughed at m
way I breathed in and out, but get it while you can, I say. Is this
we go?"

"Come along, Hilda," said Miss Trant. "You must see these dre
And then, a bolder stroke: "I'd like your advice too."

And Hilda followed them in, only making a few faint noises tha
haps suggested it was no concern of hers. She had been offerin
sister advice about clothes for the last fifteen years and she wa
going to stop now, even if the girl had suddenly turned herself i
manager of pierrots. Once inside, however, she was compelled to
to the enthusiastic babble of Miss Thong, who seemed to think i
her duty to attach herself to this other visitor.

"So this is where you are then," cried Miss Thong. "Oh, is
nicely fit-up? Proper stage too! And I shall see them all on it t
and my dresses as well. Where will I be sitting, I wonder. I'd l
sit on my seat now, just to try it. Where will you be sitting,
Newark?"

"I shan't be here. I'm going back to London."

"Are you really? Isn't that a shame! But I expect you can see time, can't you, being Miss Trant's sister and able to come and go, are say. It's a treat for little me, I can tell you. The way I've looked ward to it, and coming on top of the journey as well! They *are* od, aren't they? And better still now than when I saw them! And cy seeing the dresses you've made yourself coming out on to the stage, t of it all, as you might say, just fancy that!"

Miss Trant was examining a dress that Elsie was holding out. "Oh, this is perfectly lovely," she cried. She looked up, caught her sister's , and saw a gleam of interest in it. "Do look at this, Hilda," she d.

Yes, it is rather charming," Hilda admitted. "But too good for this t of work, I should think."

Oh no, Mrs. Newark," cried Miss Thong. "You can't say that. It'll ar like anything and wash too. Just you take hold of it and have a od look.

nd Hilda did have a good look, at that and the others, and though still maintained a rather stately and condescending attitude, as if were looking down upon the dresses, their creator, and their pros- tive wearers, from a great height, she even went to the length of con- tulating Miss Thong.

I had thought of having a sort of Mid-Victorian scene," Miss Trant l her. "Do you remember that pile of old songs we had at home? ne of them could be used. Do you remember how we used to laugh hem, though some were quite charming? And what became of the oline? Didn't you take it to town for a fancy dress?"

Yes, but you couldn't use it for the stage," said Hilda, forgetting her- . "It's not bright enough. Besides, it's far too skimpy. Don't you nember how small it was? I meant to have it altered but I never ."

Yes, I know, Hilda, but I thought if you wouldn't mind lending it me—a Mid-Victorian scene would be delightful, wouldn't it—Miss ong could copy it more or less. You see how clever she is. I quite ee that it's not bright enough. Now what colours would you sug- t, my dear?" she enquired demurely.

t was absurd, but Hilda found herself not only promising to lend the oline but also suggesting colours and materials and actually discuss-

ing the whole question with this fantastic little dressmaker that Eli
beth had picked up on her ridiculous travels. And by the time th
had finished, she was ready for a cup of tea. But she did not stay
the performance in the evening. To have done that would have been
suggest that she had no will of her own at all, to say nothing of missi
the Dexters' party. She insisted upon returning, as she had plann
by the 5.35, and said so a good many times, for somehow it sound
like a train that a strong-minded woman would catch.

"And mind you, Elizabeth," she said at the station, "I haven't chang
my mind in the least. I think you're behaving dreadfully. The wh
thing's too absurd for anything. And you really ought to see Lawren
as soon as you can, because you're probably being hopelessly swind
every minute. And do look after yourself, and the very instant you f
less mulish and realise how futile and wearing the whole thing is,
us know, just drop it, and run, and we'll see—at least Lawrence wil
that these people don't try to take advantage."

"Very well, Hilda. I will," said Miss Trant, very quietly, almost s
missively, and with only the tiniest flicker of amusement in her f
But she could hear the voice of another Hilda, busy explaining aw
the antics of her younger sister, Elizabeth, and even making social cap
out of them. "Yes, my dear," this voice was saying brightly, "it's p
fectly true. The crazy creature is actually running round the count
managing a concert party. Of course they're not the ordinary kind
awful fourth-rate people, but really good—one or two quite young a
simply geniuses—and Elizabeth discovered them in some obscure pl
and said she would make them famous. And there she is, hiring thea
and designing costumes and all the rest of it. Oh, quite crazy, of cour
But very amusing and original, don't you think? Exactly! Why n
That's what I say. As a matter of fact, I've given her some pretty g
advice about one or two things she didn't understand." And so t
other voice ran on, while Miss Trant lifted her eyes demurely to m
her sister's reproachful glance.

After Hilda had given a final caution and a final wave from the 5
Miss Trant returned briskly to her little hotel, with a wind from the
whipping the blood in her cheeks for her flying colours. She did
care now. There were no longer two Miss Trants, wrestling and jabb

e dark of her mind, but only one, looking boldly upon the world out wo fine grey eyes. The test had come—and gone. If only these le would crowd in and enjoy her *Good Companions,* instead of staymiserably at home or going to the pictures or sitting in bar-parlours ight, she would be happy.

IV

nesday night was better than Monday or Tuesday; there were more le, especially in the cheaper seats, and, perhaps influenced by Miss ng, who clapped everything, they were a trifle more enthusiastic. rsday night was better still, but then Thursday was closing-day for shops. Friday, however, was just as good as Thursday, and rather appreciative. But none of these—as Mrs. Joe said—were what you really call Nights. There were still rows and rows of empty s (the Wood Family, Jimmy Nunn called them); the applause was e, scattered, and there was hardly an excuse for an encore; and it difficult not to feel that the mournful night was drifting in and hering such enthusiasm as there was in the half-empty pavilion. And the great question was, Would Saturday be a Night?

Saturday's a fizzle," Mrs. Joe announced on Friday night, in the s' dressing-room, "I shan't dare to look Miss Trant in the face, my s. Dotworth didn't matter——"

here wasn't tuppence in the whole rotten little town," Elsie put in, ing her face far too vigorously. "If they had a whist-drive there, d want to knock off and stay at home for six months."

ut this place is different. It's supposed to be a good date, and after 's only the middle of October. And look what we've done," Mrs. added, dejectedly. "Miss Trant will think we're a lot of Jonahs, is, if she understands the expression, which I doubt."

ucky for her!" cried Susie, that child of the theatre. She pulled her over her head, and then remarked on emerging: "I must say I'd to show her a real Night. She's cheerful enough—bless her!—but cy a full house, money turned away, encores all round, five cur-, speeches, thanks from the manager—the usual 'riot' that everybody about in the adverts, and hardly anybody ever sees—would buck

her up no end. I know it would. And that new number of mine
Jimmy and Inigo have written is only waiting for an audience that i
sitting there just to hear *God Save the King*. It's just crying out, la
for a few live ones in front."

"Exactly," said Mrs. Joe. "Experienced as I am—and very few arti
who *are* artistes have struck more dead frosts than I have in my tim
cannot, no, I can*not,* sing to chairs. I can feel the empty spaces, my
I assure you I can, and you've no idea how it wrecks my interpreta
I told Miss Trant this morning when I met her on the front: I
'Properly speaking, you've not heard me really interpret a song yet.'
I didn't tell her why. I felt it would have been adding insult to in
—not that I've done her any injury, but you know what I mean?"

They did know what she meant, and they all sighed in chorus f
Night.

Jimmy Nunn and Mr. Morton Mitcham, having what they calle
quick one" with the manager of the Pier, Mr. Porson, in the Refr
ment Room on Saturday morning, could not keep away from the
ject.

"Yes," said Mr. Porson, "we're round about forty-three pounds so
That means you'll just about make up to your guarantee tonight, u
of course there's a rush. A wet night might bring 'em in, though th
not fond of walking out to the Pier on a wet night. If it's fine,
they don't want to come inside, and if it's wet they don't fancy the
And Mr. Porson added the short and rather cheerless laugh that h
ways tacked on to this observation, which he had made already at
fifty times this season, to say nothing of other seasons.

"If you ask me," said Mr. Mitcham impressively, "I think we're ge
going in the town. Some of the fellows who come in here, fellows
never go in to see a show, are beginning to talk about it. They've
something, you see. If we were here another week, we'd be playi
capacity. I know. I've seen it before. But there you are, we're not."

"Just what I think," Jimmy Nunn admitted sadly. "We've got g
but too late. And damned hard cheese, I call it. As I told you,
Porson, this lady who's the boss, Miss Trant, she's put up a lot of
for us——"

A lot of money," Mr. Mitcham repeated emphatically, with the air of an who knows money when he sees it.

She's new to it, you see, Mr. Porson," Jimmy continued, "and she's of the best, a real lady too—general's daughter, they say. It's time began seeing something for her money."

She'll think we've sold her the gold brick," Mr. Mitcham put in urnfully.

And the show ought to go," said Jimmy.

It oughter go big," said Mr. Mitcham, who, in this despondent mood, ned to become more Transatlantic.

Mr. Porson had heard something like this, usually in this very bar, y week since April, but he immediately agreed that it was a good w. "I don't say it's everybody's show," he said judicially. "It's not of your bustling, knock-'em-about, come-on-let's-have-the-applause ws. But I'll tell you frankly—I like it. You can put me down for . It's a fine little show, and we're as disappointed as you are." He shed his drink. "Well, I must be trotting." Mr. Porson was always ting, as Miss Trant and Jimmy and other people who had business h him knew to their cost. He trotted so much that he could never ound. The other two watched him go, and then looked at one an- er with slightly raised brows, which announced that they had no great nion of Mr. Porson, that Mr. Porson might be pleasant enough over rink but nevertheless was a thoroughly incompetent person, the kind nanager who would ruin the chances of any show.

What about finishing these and then walking down to see if there any bookings?" Jimmy asked. The box office was at the entrance he Pier. It took them ten minutes to reach it, but by the time they they had quietly dismissed nine men out of every ten who had found r way, obviously by influence, my boy, into management, as crea- es who merely cumbered the ground.

Good morning, my dear; you're looking very bright this morning," Mr. Mitcham to the young lady in the box office, who looked any- ng but bright. "And how are things?"

ut the young lady, who suffered a good deal from bronchial trouble, ly did brighten now. "Quite picking up today," she replied. "I've ked out about two and a half rows of the two-and-fourpennies al- ly, and I've had several enquiries on the telephone. I shouldn't be surprised if a lot of the better-class people aren't coming, for once. believe you're going to get a good house tonight."

"Bless you, my child, for those kind words," said Jimmy. Then exchanged a glance with Mr. Mitcham. "It looks better, ol' man."

"It's just as I said," replied Mr. Mitcham. "We've got going in town, though only at the last minute. Another week and it 'ud be cap ity every night."

"Well, a good send-off will be something. It'll cheer us all up look well in the adverts. 'Thanks for wonderful send-off at Sandy Last night a riot!' And I'll tell you what I think, Mitcham," Jim added earnestly. "Mr. Porson ought to get more chairs in. He told himself he'd lent about fifty to the corporation. Let him put 'em b I say. There's time this afternoon. I'll leave a message."

Miss Trant herself saw the extra chairs being taken in, late in afternoon. Mr. Oakroyd was there, lending a hand.

"I suppose they're expecting something rather wonderful next we she said to him, with a touch of bitterness. "They don't want any m seats for us."

"Nay, Miss Trant, they do," he told her, pushing back his little bro cap as usual, for he always wore his cap and always saluted her in manner. "It's going to be a right big do, they tell me, and even these extras ther'll nobbut be standing room for them as comes at minute, I dare say. All t'fowk where I'm lodging and ther frie and realations is coming, I do knaw, and all t'better seats is boo up, two and fower a time."

"Oh, but that's splendid, isn't it, Mr. Oakroyd?" she cried.

"It'll be a bit of a change," he admitted drily.

She looked at him reproachfully. "Is that all you can say?"

Mr. Oakroyd did not blush because he was not in the habit of bl ing, but he looked a trifle confused. "Nay," he protested, "I'm ri glad. It's champion."

Miss Trant, rather excited now, returned to the Pavilion earlier t usual in the evening, and though there was the usual mournful driz making the Pier look as forlorn as ever, already people were stream along towards the Pavilion. Sandybay had discovered, at the eleve hour, that *The Good Companions* were offering it an unusually g

. Ten minutes before the performance began, all the unreserved were filled and there were numbers of people standing at each and at the back. In another five minutes, after a few more had squeezed in, the "House Full" notice was put up and they were lly turning money away. Miss Trant, who was sitting in a corner e wings, near the ladies' dressing-room, had the news from Mr. n himself, and immediately both dressing-rooms and wings buzzed it: "Turning money away, my dear"; "Capacity to the roof, an"; and they took turns at peeping through the curtain. "Going a Night, my dear," they cried to one another. "What did I say? thing told me."

ow, Miss Trant," said Mrs. Joe, "can't you feel a difference?"

ss Trant could. The whole atmosphere of the place was changed. knew at once that on the other side of the curtain there were no r any cold spaces and empty chairs and yawns and languid stares; everybody there was expecting to be delightfully entertained, had ly met the players more than halfway, was only waiting to hum augh and break into gigantic hailstorms of applause. Miss Trant hard to be coolly amused at the excitement of the others, but id not succeed. She was as excited as they were, and was only ful that she herself had nothing to do. Oh, this might be absurd, was thrilling, it was fun!

my had a last-minute inspiration. "Let's open with the band be- the curtain. Our two numbers. *Slippin' round the Corner,* then s number." Inigo had been able to score these two songs of his e little jazz band, with some assistance from Morton Mitcham, hey had both been well rehearsed. They got their instruments ook up their places: Inigo at the piano; Jimmy at the drums; am with his banjo; and Joe, Susie and Elsie respectively with t, violin, and tenor saxophone, instruments they all played in a sh but sufficiently adequate manner. In less than a minute they waiting for the signal to begin.

use lights out and footlights up. Applause already. Then— two, three, and off they went. *Rumty-dee-tidee-dee. Rumty-dee.* Quietly at first, then louder, louder, then letting it rip. could feel the whole house moving to its rhythm through the

curtain. They were tapping; they were humming; they were e
and drinking it. A final flourish, crowned by Jimmy, who cr
his drumstick against the hanging cymbal. A moment's silence.
the Pavilion seemed all clapping hands.

“Instruments away,” shouted Jimmy through the tumult. “Al
and the opening chorus as usual! Come on, come on. Now
Inigo! Ready with that curtain, Oakroyd! Gosh! it's going w
bang tonight!”

And with a bang it went. They clapped when Joe warned
against the mighty deep, and clapped again when Mrs. Joe disco
Angus Macdonald coming home from the war. They rose as one
when Elsie tunefully announced she was looking for a boy like
They reduced Morton Mitcham to mere sweat and grinning bone
he did so many tricks and played so many tunes that both card
strings must have been red-hot by the time he had done with
They roared with laughter every time Jimmy opened his mou
crossed the stage. And when Jerry Jerningham did his slipping
the corner and Susie brought out her new song about going
then they had no mercy but clapped and stamped and whistle
drummed their feet time after time to bring the two back again.
the final curtain came, it was nearly eleven, three-quarters of an
past the usual time, and even then the enraptured audience woul
stop applauding. “Spee-ee-eech!” some of them were calling.

Jimmy beckoned to Miss Trant, who was standing in the
at once excited and exhausted, dithering, because instead of be
mere spectator she had seen both actors and audience. “Come o
say something,” Jimmy's mouth shaped at her.

Instantly she waved a frantic negative. She could no more
tottered into that lighted space and spoken to the loud if fri
monster there than have flown to the moon.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” Jimmy began.

But that was the signal for another outburst, and in the mid
it the attendant could be seen pushing his way up to the stage,
ing a magnificent bouquet of roses. The lights were up now
everybody on the stage could see that approaching bouquet. The
women never took their eyes away from it. Mrs. Joe was not w

hopes, for might there not be a Music Lover in the house? It
ied through Elsie's mind that probably some gentleman friend—
e was rich in gentlemen friends—was in front. Susie was already
paring a special smile and curtsy, for it was hardly possible that the
quet could be for any one else. If ever a girl had earned a bouquet,
had tonight. The attendant held it up, and Jimmy came forward
h a skip and a jump to receive it. He read the label, and the three
nen held their breath. He turned and, with a droll gesture and
rk, handed it—to Jerry Jerningham.

Ir. Jerningham, very warm, very tired, a little shiny perhaps, but
exquisite, bowed his acknowledgment very gracefully, then, after
uick glance at the label, which said *To Mr. Jerry Jerningham from*
Unknown Admirer and said it in a flowing and feminine hand-
ting, smiled again at the audience and smiled at his fellow players,
ee of whom were attempting to disguise looks of mingled amaze-
nt and disgust. And it may be admitted, here and now, that there
s talk of that monstrous bouquet for weeks afterwards in the ladies'
ssing-room, that we ourselves have perhaps not heard the last of
that the Unknown Admirer may turn up again.

t was over at last. Inigo, hotter and even more weary than Mr.
ningham and not at all exquisite, hammered out something that
roximated to *God Save the King,* and then, safe behind the lowered
tain, nearly fell off his chair. "This is the boy that ought to have a
iquet," said Mrs. Joe, who had a great opinion of Inigo. "Look how
s worked. And never even got so much as a hand!"

Yes, it's a rotten shame," said Susie, smiling at him. "Look—his lock
hair's nearly coming out. Never mind, you were wonderful, Inigo,
l the song's a darling, darling, da-ar-ling." And off she ran.

iss Trant found Mr. Porson at her elbow, saying something about
urns and a future date, but at the moment it was impossible for her
be quietly sensible. They were all still shouting congratulations to
e another and clearing away their props. It was like the end of a
zy party. After a minute or two, she decided to wait outside until
ne of the others had finished changing. And very strange it was to
outside and find the night there, the glitter of the promenade, the

mysterious and murmuring dark of the sea, the lonely lights far the chill salt breath that now seemed so sweet.

Out they came, dim shapes with jubilant voices. A cigarette curving over the side like a tiny meteor, and a voice said: "Ah, rather taste the air than that." They gathered round her. "Well, was a Night, wasn't it?" they chorussed; and "What a send-off!" "A riot at Sandybay, my dear!" Jerry Jerningham held out his ros Elsie, who condescended to smell them. Mrs. Joe found Mr. Joe, tucked her arm in his and gave the scene a pleasantly domestic flav so that you could almost see little George himself there with th Inigo went dodging round so that he could place himself by the sid Susie, a bafflingly elusive girl. Mr. Mitcham was still in the middl an anecdote to which nobody was paying any attention. Jimmy N came up, giving instructions to Mr. Oakroyd. Then suddenly, al once, they were telling one another how tired they were.

"And so am I," cried Miss Trant, "although I haven't done anyth I feel as if I could go to bed for three days. Thank goodness it's Sun tomorrow!"

"Yes," said Jimmy, "and by the way, I've looked up the trains Winstead. I've got it down in my notebook and I'll look it up w we get to the entrance. No Through, of course. The usual cross-co try business—an hour's wait at Mudby-on-the-Wash and then anot hour at Washby-on-the-Mud, and so on. Who are you taking in car, Miss Trant? You'd better let us know now."

"Oh, good heavens, I'd forgotten!" she cried, in such droll dismay t they laughed. "I was thinking I was going to have a nice quiet day h breakfast in bed with a book and then a little sewing. I'd forgotten about Winstead. Isn't it terrible? We've got to begin all over agai And then they laughed at her again, for there was something in tone that told them she was now much happier about it all and seem to establish her companionship with them. They moved slowly towa the Pier entrance, planning the next day's journey.

Chapter Four

OAKROYD PLAYS "THE HUNTED MAN" FOR A SHORT SEASON

I

T THE beginning of that week at Sandybay, Mr. Oakroyd was a happy man. Never in all his dreams of being an independent tsman had he been so independent or so much the craftsman as he now. He put in as many hours working as he had done at Higden's , and sometimes he put in a great deal more, achieving a day's labour would have horrified every Trade Union secretary in the country. you could hardly call it work; it was like a kind of hobby; it was ing but a pleasant dream of work; and it made old Sam Ogle-pe, with his "Joinery and Jobbing Work Promptly Attended To," hen-run and his cottage, look like "two-pennorth o' copper." When Oakroyd remembered that only a week or two before, he had envied Sam, he was amazed at his good fortune, which indeed had still ething unreal about it. True, he had a lot to learn about this busi-; all this messing about with curtains and bits of scenery and electric ts was new to him; but then he was learning fast and liking it. So g as they did not want him to appear on the stage—he drew the line that, even if it was only choosing a card out of a pack for Mr. cham—he was ready to do anything they asked him to do. And if he de any bit of a thing for these people, they were pleased and thankful l went on about it until he hardly knew where to look. This attitude ards work seemed to him astonishingly novel. At Higden's, if you n't put all your back into a job, they asked you what you thought were there for; but when you did put your back into it, finishing job in fine style, then they said "Ay, that'll do." And he could not p thinking that these strange theatrical people—indeed, all these therners he was meeting now—did overdo this patting you on the back and making a fuss when you did some little bit of a thin made you feel soft. But he was also compelled to admit that it di the wheels and put heart into you when you had to tackle somet new. Oh, the job was a gift!

Then there was the travelling. Talk about being on t'road! about being down South! Why, at this rate, there would hardly be where in England where they hadn't been, after six months. The p these theatre folk had seen! Even Susie, only a bit of a lass, could by the hour, like Joby Jackson himself, about the towns she had bee dozens and dozens of them. As for Mr. Mitcham, if you only beli half he said, he must have played that banjo of his and done his juring in nearly every place under the sun, in places too where would not think they would want to hear a banjo or see any conju Such folk, who could afford to be particular, might well think not of Rawsley and Dotworth, but Mr. Oakroyd had enjoyed himsel both these towns. They seemed to him delightfully foreign. At Ra the woman at his lodgings had given him for supper one night s little dry dumplings with bits of bacon in them, something that B dersford had never set eyes on; and in a pub there he had met a who thought Bruddersford United was a rugby team. Dotworth equally outlandish. There they had put nothing but Swiss milk in called buns "cakes," did not know that wool had to be washed combed before it was spun, and got terribly mixed up between Y shire and Lancashire all the time. It was in a pub at Dotworth tha had been able to set a chap right very nicely. This was a scene he often wistfully amused himself by, imagining back at Bruddersf when he dreamed of being a travelled man. He had imagined hi taking his pipe out of his mouth and saying quietly, "Half a mi mate! You're wrong there. I've been and I knaw." And it had act happened like that. This chap, who drove a cart and seemed to f himself, was laying down the law a bit and got on to talking about Great North Road. He said it went through Lincoln and York, all the Dotworth innocents, gaping at him over their half-pints, said he was quite right. Then it happened. Mr. Oakroyd took his pipe of his mouth and said quietly, "Half a minute, mate! You're wr there." Ho, 'e was, was 'e? Yes, he was, and had he ever been d

reat North Road? No, he hadn't, but he had pals who had and
it well. "Well, yer pals is wrong too, mate," Mr. Oakroyd had
him and the company. "Great North Road nivver sees Lincoln and
I've been and I knaw. Only come down it t'other night, on a
." And for the next quarter of an hour, he had told them a thing
vo, and the landlord himself had stayed in the taproom to listen.
ither of these places, however, could compare with Sandybay. He
ready to put Sandybay in front of the other seaside towns he had
d, Morecambe, Blackpool, and Scarborough, not because there was
"going off" there (most people say "going on" but in Brudders-
they say "going off"—a subtle and significant difference) for in
respect it was inferior to the other three, especially Blackpool, where
were more amusements than in any other town in the world. No,
referred Sandybay because it had more of the sea about it. There
the boats drawn up on the beach, the nets and all the other para-
nalia, the lifeboat, and the fishermen themselves, with their blue
ys, brown faces, and white whiskers, just like the fishermen in pic-
. One old man down there was the very image of the man he had
so often on the packets and advertisements of his favourite tobacco,
Salt. Mr. Oakroyd had actually spoken to him. He had a word or
with a good many of these fishermen, down at the beach or over a
at one of the funny little pubs near the harbour. He found it hard
nderstand what they said, and they seemed to find it hard to under-
d him, but that only made it all the more interesting, like being
ng foreigners, except that they seemed to like a drop of beer and a
of tobacco and were not above cadging one or the other. Joe liked
lk to these chaps too, and sometimes went round with them. All the
rots were friendly enough—"they got on champion," as Mr. Oak-
l admitted—but Joe was really the only one he could go about with
t. Joe might be a singer—and a rare old noise he could make too—
he was a solid and sensible chap, with arms on him like two, who
d his pipe and glass of bitter and was a good talker when you once
him going. By the time they had reached Sandybay, the two of
n were quite confidential. Joe talked to Mr. Oakroyd about their
rge, and Mr. Oakroyd talked to Joe about their Lily.

hen again, Mr. Oakroyd was happy because so far he liked being in lodgings. He discussed this subject with Joe when the two of were working at that little "set" in the Pavilion. Joe had been grum saying he was sick of being in lodgings. He wanted a home of his

"Well, I can fancy that, Joe," replied Mr. Oakroyd, " 'cos you've at it a long while. But being i' lodgings is a change for me, and not pining for any home of me awn or wanting to go back to I've got. It's a bit of a treeat to me being a lodger, Joe."

"How d'you make that out?" asked Joe. "It's not your own You can't do what you like. You've got to put up with anything give you."

"Nay, I find you're a deal better off. When I were at home, didn't belong to me but to t'wife. She may ha' done what she but I knaw I didn't. And if I didn't put up wi' owt she gave nivver heard last on it for days. If you tell t'woman at your lod you don't want rice pudding all t'week, she might bang t'door as she goes out, but she won't stand there calling you ivvery name can lay tongue to and then start afresh next morning or look at y if you'd been trying to set fire to t'place."

"Now, Oakroyd," Joe protested, "you're not going to tell me you henpecked like that."

"No more ner t'next man," said Mr. Oakroyd grimly. "But I ni even heard tell of a henpecked lodger."

"Maybe. But you've heard tell of many a one that's been swin and diddled and robbed. And if you haven't, there's one here, tal to you. Some of 'em would take the milk out of your tea and the out of your boots. They'd charge you for the stairs going up to be they could. I could tell you some tales."

"No doubt you could, Joe," said Mr. Oakroyd earnestly, "and I'm denying that gurt fat woman I lodged wi' i' Dotworth were a bit t'skinny side when it come to laying table. For all that, I'm doing be ner I've done for some time. Nah, as you knaw yersen, three poun t'week isn't a big wage. I've had more ner that afore today and th I were badly off. But when you've nobbut yersen to keep and yo i' lodgings it seems to me you get more out on it than you do at ho You pay your two pound or whativver it is to t'landlady and she tr you like a good customer, as if you wor somebody. At home you ou can but you're nobody. 'Oh, it's you, is it?' they say when you home. 'Well, you'll have to wait for your tea 'cos I haven't finished I'm doing. And how many times have I to tell you to tak' them oots off when you come in! Look at mess you're making!' That's you get at home, Joe. But when I walk into my lodgings, it's a ifferent. 'You're just in time, Mr. Oakroyd,' they say. 'Your tea'll ady in one minute. I shan't keep you waiting. Nice afternoon it's , Mr. Oakroyd.' D'you see, Joe?"

did see but was not convinced. "And when you've lived a year vo on landlady's cooking, old man," he said, "you'll change your l. There's Jimmy Nunn there always grumbling because he can't nything, but I sometimes think he's lucky. He knows he can't get ut I think I'm going to get something and I don't."

ass me up them inch nails, Joe," said Mr. Oakroyd. Then he re- d a minute or two. "Well, I must say I've seen better cooking i' my than you get round these parts. That's because you're out o' shire. Down South here t'women doesn't bake and you can't get rran' teacake or a flat cake or a fatty cake or owt like that. Eh, a right good laugh yesterda'. Woman where I am—Mrs. Cullin name is—she's a widow woman—her husband were at gas-works and had a good job too, she tells me—she's a decent clean little , and friendly like—she tells me all sorts—well, Mrs. Cullin, she says e yesterda', she says 'Now, Mr. Oakroyd, I'm going to give you a ,' she says. 'I've a joint o' beef for your dinner and you're a York- eman, so I'm going to give you some Yorkshire pudding with it,' says. In comes my dinner—bit o' beef, cabbage, potaters. I looks and says 'Here, Mrs. Cullin, what about that Yorkshire pudding?' ys. 'Let's have that first.' She stares. 'It's here,' she says, pointing 'plate. 'What!' I says. 'You don't mean this bit o' custard, soft er stuff, under t'cabbage?' 'Yes, I do,' she says. 'If that isn't York- e pudding, what is it?' 'Nay,' I says, 'you mun't ask me, Missis, t it is. All I knaw is, it's no more Yorkshire pudding ner I am. a bit o' custard or pancake, likely enough.' And then I tells her ut Yorkshire pudding. And tak' notice o' this, Joe, 'cos it'll happen e in handy some time." Mr. Oakroyd paused to relight his pipe, v out a cloud or two of *Old Salt,* then continued.

"To begin wi',' I says, 'a Yorkshire pudding is eaten by itsen not mixed up wi' meat and potaters, all in a mush. And it c straight out o' t'oven,' I says, 'straight on to t'plate. No waiting,' I 'or you'll spoil it. If you don't put it straight on to t'plate you m as well go and sole your boots with it. And another thing,' I 'you've got to have your oven hot, I do knaw that. Then if yo mixed right and your oven's hot, pudding'll come out as light feather, crisp and brarn, just a top and a bottom, you might say, none o' this custardy stuff in t'middle. Nah d'you see, Missis?' I 'Nay,' she says, 'I can't learn all that at my time o' life, and yo letting your dinner get cold wi' talking about your hot ovens,' she And then we'd a right good laugh together, and I heard her te her daughter—she's in a draper's—all about it last night. She has lass at home and a lad, and another lad away i' t'Navy, and they'r courting—even t'sailor's young woman is allus coming in—so we s bit o' company. And they're all coming o' Saturday night to see

"That's the idea," said Joe. "You go on working the town a That's what I do. Some of the boys and girls laugh at me, but I it all helps."

"It does an' all," cried Mr. Oakroyd. "They tak' a right intere t'pierrots at Mrs. Cullinses'. 'Is it a good show?' they asks me. 'C show!' I says. 'It's t'best show as ivver you've seen i' Sandybay,' I 'We're nobbut here just to pass an odd week, then we're off to the-aters—coining brass,' I says. 'Coining what?' they says. 'Bra says, 'and that's Yorkshire for money. You come and see *Good C panions.* You'll nivver get another chance, and when you read a 'em i' t'papers—and you'll be doing that afore so long—you'll be mad if you've nivver seen 'em. Best show on t'road,' I says."

And indeed this was Mr. Oakroyd's opinion. He was fully convi that there was no better concert party than *The Good Companio* existence. It is true he did not know much about the others, had n even seen them; but then he could not imagine any one of them b better, could not imagine any other being as good, so that he was c honest in his opinion. Nor was his enthusiasm merely part and p of his loyalty to his new friends and to his employer, Miss Trant. had never been a constant theatre-goer or music-hall patron, thoug ked seven-pennorth of Pit at the second house of the Bruddersford ial, but nevertheless he considered himself to be a man who knew d turn when he saw it. Your Bruddersfordian is a hanging judge ything that costs money. And Mr. Oakroyd, after having seen the from almost every possible angle, was convinced that *The Good panions* were good turns. He thought least of Elsie, whose rather anical little frivolities he dismissed as "summat and nowt." On ther hand, the dancing of Mr. Jerry Jerningham had no more ch admirer in this island, and Mr. Oakroyd did not hesitate to give hat he was something of an authority and no ordinary onlooker, his youth he had been considered one of the best clog-dancers in Voolgate and Lane End districts of Bruddersford and had once third prize at the Pitt Park Gala. For Mr. Jerningham himself d a contempt. "Yond," he would say, "is war ner a big lass. es his belly to clothe his back, I'll be bound"; and, becoming more riously West Riding in his turn of phrase with every added insult, d conclude by muttering that Mr. Jerningham "wer war ner a sheep heead," which final and awful judgment was not the less tating because nobody understood what it meant. But Mr. Oak- made a clear distinction between Jerningham the man and Jerning- the dancer, and for the latter he had a genuine admiration. And was a favourite with him, on and off the stage. She was obviously d turn, though he could not always make out what she was getting d she was a lively, bonny, and friendly lass, reminding him so much eir Lily that he found her company nearly as delightful and yet rbing as did Inigo himself. Inigo too he admired as a piano-player iked as a friendly young chap with not a bit of swelled head about (In Bruddersford you are always on the lookout for swelled heads, f a man does anything at all out of the ordinary there, his head has measured at once.) There was too a special bond between him Inigo because, as he explained to Joe: "We're both i' t'same boat, amachoors, as you say, who comes at t'same time and is trying to you what we can do." And it was clear from Mr. Oakroyd's tone, said this, that he thought the two of them were not only trying ucceeding.

For Miss Trant he had a tremendous respect, though he took not to show it. There was something about her—he knew it was but did not care to discover exactly what it was—that commande respect, and it was something he had never found in Sir Joseph H Bart., and other men of wealth and standing for whom he had w in Bruddersford. None of *The Good Companions* (who had tal over more than once) knew how much money Miss Trant had, w she was really rich or merely in possession of a decent income few hundreds to spare for this whim of hers; but it was Mr. royd's opinion that she had plenty of money and had had it so that she never thought about it. "Brass might graw on trees so she knaws or cares," he said of her; and this opinion, which would enraged a democrat of an earlier generation, only tended to increa wondering respect for her. Bruddersford had its rich and its poo he never remembered meeting any one there like Miss Trant. Th of them were like beings from two different planets who had ye covered points of contact and sympathy. If Miss Trant had b man, perhaps his attitude would have been different, but not onl she a woman but, in his eyes, a very personable young woman. H talked about her to Susie, one afternoon, when the two of them w the length of the Pier. Susie was very fond of Miss Trant and th her—as she said—"really swish and a dear," but of course prac middle-aged, with nothing but a deadly spinsterish sort of life in of her once she had left *The Good Companions.* Mr. Oakroy immediately protested against this view of his employer.

"Nay, Soos," he said, "you're off your horse there, lass. I wo be so capped if Miss Trant didn't marry afore so long. She may a chap nah, nobbut waiting for her to say t'word. She's young for onnybody; you've nobbut to look at her to see she's one o' the sort that happens to ha' got plenty o' gumption; and she's right looking into t'bargain. And if I were a chap coming courting here, Trant 'ud be t'first I should go for, so nah you knaw."

"So that's it, is it?" Susie pretended to be very disgusted i "Well, you *are* a fraud, Mr. Jess Oakroyd. And after I've been s to you! What about me, yer gurt nowt?"

wouldn't be paid to wed thee, Soos," he declared, delightedly. "A 'ud nivver have five minutes peace and quiet to hissen wi' thee, a'd be kissin' him one minute and tormenting him t'next minute hen thrawing pots and pans at him minute after. If tha wasn't g him he mun nivver leave thee for half an hour, then tha'd be g him tha were leaving him for ivver, till t'poor lad wouldn't know er he wor on his head or his heels."

nd very nice for him too," she replied. "He'd like it. Though e simply talking rot, of course. You don't know anything about ally, not the least thing, and it's simply cheek to say I should go ke that. But do you really think I would?"

n saying nowt," he began.

nd about time too!"

ut I do knaw this. There's a lad i' this company I've got my eye nd I'm feeling right sorry for him already."

ow what—just exactly what—do you mean by that, Mr. Oakroyd?"

e may be a good pianner-player. I don't say he isn't. They tell e might easy mak' a lot o' money out o' t'songs he's doing. I don't t it. But I've had my eye on him, and I say I'm right sorry for If he goes on t'way he's shaping, he'll land hissen in a mess, choose it works out. If this lass he's getting so sweet on won't have him, he'll nivver knaw no peace. But if she does have him, he'll nivver no peace, neither."

never heard such stuff in all my life," cried Susie. "As if I—he— ody—oh, don't be silly! And if he was getting like that—and of e he isn't; he hasn't known me five minutes, not that that makes difference, I admit—well, it wouldn't be my fault, would it?"

ot so much your fault as his misfortin," said Mr. Oakroyd, with a

ah lad, nah lad!" Susie snapped her fingers at him. "And if body had told me that a carpenter from Shuddersford could be ly nosey, just like an old woman, I wouldn't have believed them. just run away and do some work instead of talking scandal that e made up yourself and"—here her voice sank and took on a l-curdling vibration—"poisoning the mind and betraying the heart of A Young Girl, hardly more than a Chee-ild and a Norphan. Sir Jess."

And that wicked baronet, pulling his little brown cap further d did go, giving her a wink as he went. He entered the Pavilion thr the stage door. If anybody had told him a fortnight ago he woul marching in through stage doors! Inside there was a nice littl waiting for him. When he had done that, had a chat with Joe an or two of the others perhaps, smoked a pipe or two of *Old Salt,* was the grand walk back to his lodgings and tea at the end of it. " afternoon, Mr. Oakroyd; your tea's just ready and I've done one o special fat kippers you like so much." "Nah that's a bit of all Mrs. Cullin," he would reply; and then have his tea and a look a paper, then a walk round and perhaps half a pint somewhere, then to the Pier, taking his time; his own man, a chap that was kno about a bit, and one of *The Good Companions.* Eh, but it was gr

"Nay, lad," he warned himself, "steady on, steady on a bit. not asleep and dreaming. There's bahnd to be a catch in it somewh

And the second half of that week at Sandybay brought the catch

II

It was a letter that destroyed his peace of mind. He had soon that he could not cut himself off entirely from the folk at home. must know where to find him, for though they might think they better off without him, be glad to see the last of him, still there were, his wife and his son, and if anything happened to them, would want to let him know and he would want to know. There also the question of Lily's letters. It took over a fortnight for a to find its way to her out there in Canada, and more than another night for a reply to come back; in fact, you could reckon it six w there and back, even if she replied almost at once. He had—as he —"studied this" when first he joined the troupe. He could write t just as usual, and indeed he intended to write more often now th had so much to tell her. But how was she going to reply? He c not give her his address six or seven or eight weeks ahead, for he w not always know where they would be then. He saw that she w to write to him at 51, Ogden Street, Bruddersford, as before, and etters would have to be sent on to him by his wife or (and that more likely) by Leonard. All he had to do was to let them know me where he would be the next week, and he could always find out. He asked Joe about this, and discovered from him that all was necessary was to give the name of the troupe, the hall, and the : Mr. J. Oakroyd, *The Good Companions,* Pier Pavilion, Sandybay t is how you did it, and that is what he sent home, the week before tworth, together with a short letter saying that he had got a job some pierrots and telling them to send on Lily's letters. And he written again, giving them his Winstead address, before a reply

was on Thursday afternoon that he found a letter waiting for him Pavilion. He hurried away with it to a quiet corner and was ted to discover that it contained a letter from Lily. But she did y much. It was still very hot out there; she was all right but it easy because of the baby that was coming, which she was sure boy; and her husband, Jack Clough, was working very hard and l like getting a rise very soon; and they sent their love to all. he had read this letter through a second time, Mr. Oakroyd to feel miserable. It brought Lily back so sharply to his mind, could not hold a clear image of her face nor hear her voice dis- yet was most vividly, poignantly conscious of her. The letter is, yet at the same time it made painfully plain the distance be- them. There she was, but this was all she could say. Tomorrow uld sit down, sucking away at his moustache, pressing so hard on n that it spluttered ink on the paper, in an agony of endeavour her something of what he felt and thought, and he would say ore. If only she was here, listening to him, or he was there, look- her! Not a word yet about him going out there. He folded the with mournful care and put it in his inside pocket.

ething had been sent with it. He glanced down at the name at ttom of the scrawl. It was a short letter from Leonard. He cast er negligent eye over it. He was not very interested in what d had to say. But when he had gone through it once, he drew breath sharply, pushed his cap to the very back of his head, and

began all over again, this time attending carefully to every single w
And this is what he read:

DEAR FATHER,

We got your letter and I am sending you a letter which came from
Lily. I am having to write because Ma says she will not write be
she is too ashamed for you and will not trust herself she says to say a
to you. What have you done, you must have done something b
after you had gone a few days a bobby called one night and asked
you and where you were. We could not say we said. And that i
the end of it, Mrs. Sugden told Ma the police had been watchin
house and Joe Flather told me they had been to Higdens and aski
the club. So you had best keep away from here and keep out of th
or try a disguise or they will get you. Albert Tuggridge says it
risky writing, they can open all letters and track you down that
but I am risking it though we are not telling any body where yo
Ma is disgusted but I must say it is a bit of excitement and agree
Albert that if you have done anything you must have been the t
others and been used by a gang of crooks. We were surprized yo
got a job with some pierots and think you ought to watch out
United lost again, what a team. I have been moved up to fourth c
Gregsons allready.

Your aff. son,

LEO

After he had read it a third time, he tore it up and, still clutchi
fragments, crept quietly out of his corner, a hunted man.

For the rest of that day, he thought about that letter—a pol
calling at 51, Ogden Street; police watching the house; police en
at Higden's; police going along to the Club—and the more he t
about it, the more uneasy he became. "Nay, but I've done no
kept telling himself; but that had no effect. He had been so bu
happy in his new job that he had almost forgotten the astonishin
of events that had taken him to Rawsley, or at least he only reme
them as episodes in a tale he had to tell. But now they retu
arrange themselves in a sinister sequence. There was the mon
drunken sportsman, George, had said he had had stolen from hi
police had announced that they had a clue, a valuable clue. Th

he had quarelled with his firm and quarrelled with his union, had up his insurance card (the act of a desperate man), and had run . And that was not all. There was that lorry, loaded with stolen s, that he had travelled down on: the police had been after that. those two fellows, Nobby and Fred, and that horrible fat woman, Annie, all of them ready, no doubt, to swear his life away. Even he had not finished. There was that row at Ribsden Fair, the eman who had wanted to see his licence, the flight and all the rest he had been in that, and the policeman had had a good look at Why, everywhere he had been, he had been mixed up in some- that was against the law, at every single step on the road! That v who kept the dining-room where he had had to leave a chisel. leby his name was, that fellow would remember him and would information as fast as it was wanted—taking the "yuman line" as , the big, pasty-faced mess! Looking back, Mr. Oakroyd saw these e witnesses springing up all along the line of his travels. "I've nowt," he concluded mournfully, "but I haven't a leg to stand on."

. Oakroyd was a respectable workingman, not a member of the nal classes, and therefore he did not regard the police as his natural ies. On the other hand, his social level was not that of those rtable and well-dressed persons who think of the police purely imply as their protectors, who see them as so many stalwart, kindly, urous, obliging fellows, all with big hearts of gold beneath their tunics. He and his friends in Bruddersford had no quarrel with olice but neither had they any tenderness for them. Their attitude ne of wary neutrality. A bobby was all right in his place, though d a nasty trick of not keeping in his place. Mr. Oakroyd in his had known several policemen, had exchanged half-pints of ale and ks about football with them, and had found them good, bad, and erent like other people. Of their superiors—sergeants and inspec- nd that lot—he was rather suspicious, believing that they were too fond of having "cases" to be entirely just men or desirable nions. And of the Law itself, with all its mysterious routine and tricks, he had a real horror. "You keep out, mate," he had heard a time, had repeated himself more than once. Neither he nor any friends was one of your born lawyers, a type known to every ship, every regiment, every factory, and not popular, the kind of r who always have their "rights" off by heart, know exactly what can't be made to do, and positively welcome the chance of standing in a court of law. Mr. Oakroyd knew very well that he was innoc except in that matter of the insurance card, but he was ready to g considerable lengths in order not to be compelled to prove his innoce The idea of establishing his innocence and putting himself right w the authorities never once occurred to him; if the police were look for him, then it was his business to keep out of their way; and if th are any persons to whom this attitude seems incomprehensible, then t simply do not understand Mr. Oakroyd or anybody else in Ogden St Bruddersford.

The only satisfaction Mr. Oakroyd had was the gloomy one of kn ing now exactly where the catch was. By the next day, after m troubled reflection, he felt a hunted and haunted man. He had n noticed any policeman before in Sandybay, but now they seeme spring up round every corner. He walked past them with his h pounding away, and their suspicious eyes seemed to be digging in back. And something was always turning up to remind him of horrible position. Thus, in the afternoon, the Pavilion attendant, Cu the man with one eye and the long melancholy face, had to begin c tering.

"I see in the paper," said Curtis, "where they've got that feller did the big jewel robbery in the West End."

Mr. Oakroyd grunted.

"Made no mistake, got him fair and square," he continued enthusiasm. "They only wanted a bit of time, that's all. Now, get a bit of time." And Curtis, who seemed to have found a su that released him from his usual melancholy, laughed at his own p ant wit. "Fellers say to me, 'Oh, they'll never get him,' but I've all along, 'You wait and see, chum. Give 'em time.' What d'you Mr. Oakroyd?"

Mr. Oakroyd only grunted again. He looked at his companion shrinking distaste. One eye was lighted up and seemed to rove all him maliciously, while the other, the glass one, was fixed on his in a cold dead stare. The effect was most sinister.

ople can say what they like about the police," Curtis went on, I know a bit about 'em and I like to foller these cases, and the rlusion I've come to is just this, Mr. Oakroyd: Give the police time hey never miss their man."

. Oakroyd merely made a clicking sound with his tongue and stared him.

ever miss their man," the other repeated emphatically, at the same tapping his listener on the arm.

. Oakroyd drew back sharply. "Ar d'yer mean 'Never miss their " he said irritably.

e feller they want they find," said Curtis. "It may not be this It may not be next week. But sooner or later"—and here ld out a large and dirty hand, then suddenly closed it—"got him!" this dramatic conclusion, he looked at Mr. Oakroyd triumphantly his one eye.

wt o' t'sort!" cried Mr. Oakroyd angrily. "If you ask me, they s monny as they catch."

tis shook his head and smiled pityingly. "That's what a lot o' think, but they don't know. It's organisation that does it. Ortion, that's it."

all me eye," said Mr. Oakroyd.

, chum, it's all *their* eye." And Curtis laughed again, and was so ng that Mr. Oakroyd told himself he would like to give him "a t'lug."

end of mine's got a brother-in-law in the Metrotropilitan—you up in London, proper Scotland Yard man. You ought to hear es he tells. Not a dog's chance, they haven't got, these fellers that's l."

me eye and Betty Martin!" muttered Mr. Oakroyd.

at with photographs and fingerprints and telegraphs and wireless ying squads!" cried Curtis ecstatically. "Not a dog's chance! give 'em a bit of rope and then—got him!"

you did that afore!" Mr. Oakroyd sneered. He was now thorexasperated. "What do you want to keep doing that for? It o daft. Got him, got him! You look as if you're trying to catch ttles."

"I was just illustrating, so to speak, the way they can do it," said C meekly.

"Well, what's it got to do wi' you?" demanded Mr. Oakroyd. "O body 'ud think to hear you talk they were makking you t'chief cons o' town ——"

"All right, all right, chum. What's the matter with you?"

"Nowt's matter wi' me," replied Mr. Oakroyd, "only don't kee about it like that. You've told me. Well, let it drop, mate. I like to hear a man going on i' that fashion. Like a dam' blood-ho They've done nowt to you."

"Ar, you're too soft-hearted, that's it, Mr. Oakroyd," said Curtis, ing rather relieved. "It does you credit in a way, but believe me can't afford it, not in these times. These fellers is best out of the I like to see 'em getting under lock and key."

"I think yond's Mr. Porson," said Mr. Oakroyd and so put an to this unpleasant conversation. He took care to have no more chats with Curtis after that. But now, any out-of-the-way incident to look sinister. Things that would normally have excited his cur and given him the chance of indulging in the most delightful sp tions, now made him all the more uneasy and secretive. There wa example, that little talk he had with the chauffeur outside the Pa on Saturday afternoon, when he was helping with the extra chairs. tween two loads, when there was nothing to do, this chauffeur st up to him. He was a soldierly-looking chap in a fine blue unifor

"Hope you don't mind me asking," he said, "but haven't you thing to do with this troupe, *The Good Companions?*"

"That's right," said Mr. Oakroyd, with a touch of pride. "If you to knaw, I'm t'stage carpenter and property man for 'em." He l at the man. "And I've seen you about t'place somewhere, I'm thin

"Big blue Daimler," said the chauffeur. "You'll have seen it i town. We're staying at the Great Eastern Hotel, on the front We've seen this show twice, and when I say 'we,' I mean the m not the wife, you know; she's at home—the Daimler's missis. I'v it once too. We're coming again tonight. It's a good show."

"You won't find a better, mate."

hat is so. And it's not being patronised as it oughter be. Have ?"

ay, I nivver touch fags. I'm a pipe man missen."

e chauffeur lit his cigarette and gave Mr. Oakroyd a companion- nod or two. "Well, you're like me, I expect. One place today and er tomorrow."

hat's it," said Mr. Oakroyd, who liked this sort of talk. "We're on t'road. Packing up again tomorn."

nd where is it this time?" asked the chauffeur, with a casual air seemed a bit overdone.

ace called Winstead next week," Mr. Oakroyd replied, with all the alance of a man who is ready to go anywhere at a moment's e.

instead, eh? Lemme see, that's a smallish town, sort of market , in Northampton or Bedfordshire, isn't it?"

ay, I don't fairly knaw," Mr. Oakroyd admitted, still quite at ease. tell truth, I've nivver set eyes on t'place."

nd where after that?" the other pursued.

ah then, I'll ha' to think a bit. Is there a placed called Haxby?"

here is. It's Coventry way. Is that it?"

might be. I've heard 'em say summat about Haxby."

e chauffeur examined his cigarette. "And then where?" he asked.

ell, there wor some talk about Middleford," Mr. Oakroyd ad- d, "but that might be t'week after or it might be monny a week for all I knaw."

u couldn't get to know, I suppose, and give me a sort of a list?"

. Oakroyd stared. Then his easy friendly manner suddenly dis- red. "Here, what's the idear?" he demanded. "What's it matter u where we're going?"

just wondered, that's all," said the chauffeur, looking rather sur- l. "No harm in asking is there?"

ere might not be and then again there might," said Mr. Oakroyd, g him suspiciously. "But I can't see what it's got to do wi' you, r. It's not all plain sailing i' this business. Yer nivver knaw who talking to," he observed severely.

at is so," said the chauffeur.

"A chap i' my position has to be careful. I can't say what I l onnybody as comes up and asks. There's wheels within wheel added mysteriously.

"Well, if you want to know why I'm asking," said the chauffeu denly confidential, "I'll tell you, though I'm not supposed to. I missis that wants to know."

"The missis!" cried Mr. Oakroyd, staring.

"Lady I'm working for," explained the other, with a grin. " ask me, she's taken a fancy to this troupe of yours. She's always a fancy to something. Too much money and not enough to do, her trouble. Widow, y'know, and rolling in money. And this m she asked me to come and find out where you people was goi Wants to come and have another look at you, though she didn't So there you have it."

"Ay," said Mr. Oakroyd reflectively.

"And you can't tell me any more?"

"That I can't."

"All right. No harm done, is there?" The chauffeur gave him rather a contemptuous nod. "So long!" And off he went.

Mr. Oakroyd rubbed his chin and watched the retreating "Nay, lad," he told it, "tha's coming it a bit too thick. Missis w knaw! Missis nowt!" He did not believe this fantastic story, a felt uneasy and suspicious, and therefore took care not to menti encounter to any of the party. Perhaps if he had mentioned it, s them might not have been so puzzled by the arrival of that bouq Mr. Jerry Jerningham and by several other incidents that occurre

That last performance at Sandybay, as we know already, was a and Mr. Oakroyd enjoyed it as much as any of the others. Their t was his triumph. His broad face beamed in the wings through show, and was so ruddy and shining that it looked—as somebo —like an extra spot-light. But when it was over, when the last ap had gone and all the props were put away, he saw the shadow c over him again. And was there ever such luck! There he snugly suited as any man in England—and yet, Wanted. At any they might say "Got him!"—and then where was he? Worse o he was before. It made him sweat to think of it. "Done nowt,"

, very bitterly this time, "but not a leg to stand on!"

ow, Mr. Oakroyd," cried Miss Trant gaily when they were all ng at the Pier entrance, "you must decide. Will you go in the ain, or would you rather go by train this time? Which do you is the more romantic? I know you're a romantic person—like

l then he had to think quickly, desperately. Which was the safer? was the point. He saw himself being collared in a station. He imself being hauled out of the car. "Nay, I don't fairly knaw," mmered. "I mun think a minute, Miss Trant."

's spoilt, that's what he is," said Susie. "But that's because he's tle mascot, aren't ta, lad?"

d thi tongue, lass," cried Mr. Oakroyd. "I'll go i' t'car, thank iss Trant." Yes, the car would be safer. And he was not going e it at that. He would show them.

n he met Miss Trant the next morning he was very self-con- but she was too busy to notice that or anything else about him. morning, Mr. Oakroyd," she said. "You're in good time."

face fell. A casual glance, and she had recognised him. But then, se, she was expecting him. Then Susie joined them. There was a second person taken in the car, but never more than two be- hey carried as much luggage as possible. He greeted Susie with ish grin.

lo, hello!" she cried. "What's this? Look, Miss Trant. Do you at he's done?"

Trant smilingly examined him. "You do look a little different," d.

s shaved his moustache off," cried Susie.

e has," said Miss Trant.

s tired of being behind the scenes. Is that it, Jess? Or did you with your landlady as a little souvenir?"

't be disgusting, Susie," cried Miss Trant.

et it makes me look different," said Mr. Oakroyd, fingering his ip. "Allus does, shaving off a moustache."

oesn't much, you know," Miss Trant told him.

just the same sweet face from Shuddersford," Susie assured him.

His heart sank. It looked as if he had given himself a stiff and
upper lip for nothing. "But don't you see owt else different?" h
quired, rather wistfully.

They both looked again. This time Miss Trant was first. "I kn
she cried. "You've got a new cap, Mr. Oakroyd."

"It looks the same to me, about two sizes too small," said Susie.

"No, the other one was brown," said Miss Trant.

"I believe it was," cried Susie. "And this is grey. I remember
The old one was what they'd call in Yorkshire a mucky brown, i
it was a mucky old cap. You can see he wants to be an actor n
what with being clean-shaven and going in for being dressy like

Mr. Oakroyd grinned nervously, and pushed the cap back a littl
being the same size as the other, that is, too small, it went sliding
equally well. But though he grinned, he was at heart very disapp
indeed. For one wild moment, after he had shaved that mornin
had had a vision of Miss Trant and Susie looking at him as he
up and wondering who it was. "And half a crown gone on a ca
all," he told himself, "and I liked t'owd un. Seems to me I'll
grow a beard and wear a big trilby if I'm to disguise mysen. Thi
hopeless case." And he had already written to Ogden Street to s
would be in Winstead this coming week. If the police had got h
that letter, it might be all up with him. He did not look forward
to Winstead.

III

There is no pleasanter market town in all the East Midlands than
stead, with its cobbled square and broad High Street, its fine Fif
Century Parish Church, Elizabethan Market Hall and old gabled h
It is not a market town and nothing else, for it manufactures g
hosiery, and lace in a discreet gentlemanly fashion; there is ple
money in the town; the shops in the High Street have quite a
politan air; Munsey's Café has an orchestra (piano, violin, and
and gives a *thé dansant* twice a week; and every ten minutes or so
comes into the market square from one or other of the numerous v
that regard Winstead as the centre of all things. It has one

ce, and one small theatre, the Playhouse, which occasionally sand-es a concert party in between two seasons of stock companies.

he Good Companions were at the Playhouse, and were doing better ness there than they had done at Sandybay. The audiences were not ly enthusiastic but they were fairly large and responsive every night, cially in the more expensive seats. Winstead—as they all told one her—was proving a good "date." All the players liked the town, the exception of Jerry Jerningham, who hated the thought of play-in any place smaller than his native Birmingham and said that he "eating his hawt out in these little tawns." Their lodgings were r than usual, they agreed; cleaner, more comfortable. They were nate in the weather, which was the best golden October brew, its hine as mellow as the old red brick walls. Miss Trant, at home in a place, enjoyed every hour there. Elsie discovered in the younger Long, of Long and Passbury, estate agents and auctioneers in the Street, a gentleman friend of her residential season at Cromer, years before, and a friend ready to combine business with pleasure king her out in his two-seater. Susie pottered about, contentedly gh, though in secret she too sighed for cities and crowded streets; if she was ever alone in her excursions, that was not the fault of her gue, Inigo Jollifant. Mrs. Joe, who was beginning to feel pros-s again, planned and began executing some vast knitting work, her landlady all about George, and occasionally made a stately nce into Munsey's Café. Joe himself strolled about in the sun-with his pipe, listened to Mr. Morton Mitcham's reminiscences, played snooker with Jimmy Nunn. Jimmy, in his search for a tion, had discovered a little chemist, just at the back of the High t, who was a very droll card and might be worked up into a new er and act.

ese people, however, were not wanted by the police. Mr. Oakroyd, was convinced that he was, did not enjoy himself at Winstead. ything conspired to rob him of his peace of mind. The very sun-only lit up his face before the eyes of every passing policeman. On ery second day there he had had an alarming experience. He had ed that it was no use skulking in his lodgings, though he was very comfortable and quite at home there, and so went boldly out, in th light of the afternoon, to explore the town.

At the corner, turning into the square, he ran into a police serg a large, unpleasant-looking chap, went right into him, with a b “ ’Ello, ’ello!” the sergeant growled. Mr. Oakroyd gave him one st glance, muttered something, and hurried away as fast as he coul without actually breaking into a run. He walked across the sq dodging between the buses, and then, slackening his pace, went the High Street. There he met Jimmy Nunn, who was carrying a parcel that only a chemist could have wrapped so neatly. Ji stopped him. “Did you ever hear of this stuff, Oakroyd?” he said, ing up his packet. “Pepsinate, they call it.” And he kept Mr. royd there for five minutes listening to a description of Pepsinate, w had, it appeared, arrived at its final test, namely, a fight to a finish Jimmy’s stomach. At the end of these five minutes, Mr. Oa chanced to glance across the road. There, standing on the pavemen looking directly at him, was the large sergeant.

He hurriedly said good-bye to Jimmy, but this time took care n appear as if he was running away, and merely sauntered along, sto now and again to examine a shop window. The first time he ven another glance across the road, the sergeant was still there and a ently still keeping an eye on him. The second time he glanced a however, the sergeant was not to be seen. Mr. Oakroyd pushed his cap in sheer relief and admitted that he was a fool to frighten hi in this fashion. He stood staring idly at the side window of a shop. After a moment or two, he was still staring but no longer There was something blue moving above that pair of gent’s box It was a reflection in the mirror at the back, and it was a reflection policeman’s uniform. The sergeant was just behind him. He st down, pretending to tie a lace, and cocked an eye at the pavement, ing to see a pair of gulation blue trousers move past. They di come. Suddenly, he lunged forward and hurried off, without a g behind him. As he went, he thought he heard a deep voice s “ ’Ere, half a minute!” A few yards further on, he slipped acros road, between two cars, and was just about to break into a run wh ught sight of another policeman eyeing him severely. The place was ll of policemen.

“A nice little place like this an’ all! What do they want so monny r?” he asked himself angrily. “Gurt idle nowts! Waste o’ fowk’s ass, I calls it.” By this time, however, he had taken the first turning t of the High Street down a narrow side-street, and had come to other road full of shops. Here there were no policemen to be seen. mensely relieved, he lit a pipe of *Old Salt,* and walked slowly along. picture of a large steamer pulled him up. There was also a picture a man standing in a cornfield, holding out his hands, and saying ome to Canada.” He spent several minutes looking at these and other tures and thinking about Lily and Canada. The shop was a Tourist d Shipping Agency, and Mr. Oakroyd, peeping in, could see a num- of booklets spread out on the counter. He had examined some of se little books before, and they had a kindly trick of bringing Lily a nearer. Some of them might have a map that would show him just ere she was. He went in and began turning over the booklets. No- dy bothered about him, and when he had looked them all over, he pped two of the largest into his pocket and walked out. And there, king straight at him, blocking up the whole pavement, was the geant.

Well?” said the sergeant.

What’s up?” Mr. Oakroyd stammered, his heart thumping away.

What do *you* want to run away for?” The sergeant sounded very ce indeed.

Nay, I weren’t running away,” replied Mr. Oakroyd.

And what’s the idear ’aving this brogue?” the sergeant went on. ere was a suggestion of good-humour now beneath his fierceness. hat d’you think you are now—Lancashire comedian?”

What do you mean?” asked Mr. Oakroyd desperately. “Sorry, ser- nt, but I don’t foller yer,” he added, more politely.

he sergeant stepped forward and looked at him so intently that his rt turned to water. It must, he thought, be all up now. But the ser- nt was beginning to look puzzled. “You’re either Jimmy Pearson,” said finally, “or his twin brother.”

"Nay, I'm not. I knaw nowt about onny Pearsons. I'm a—I'm stranger here, sergeant."

"What's your name?"

"Oa——" he began, then recollected himself. "Oglethorpe," he nounced boldly, "Sam Oglethorpe. And I come from Wabley i' Y shire."

"And you sound as if you do, Mister," said the sergeant. "W you're the very spit of a feller called Pearson that used to live h When you give me that bump in the square, I said to myself 'Th Jimmy Pearson come back. I'll 'ave a word with him.' Not too f of us, Jimmy wasn't—used to make a book now and again—but didn't mind him. And the way you was dodging round was Jimmy over."

Mr. Oakroyd saw that it would not do to pretend he had never the sergeant before. "After I'd gi'en you such a bump at t'corner th I thowt I'd better keep out o' t'road," he said, with an appearanc great candour.

That was all right then. They were friendly enough when parted, but the encounter had given Mr. Oakroyd such a shock tha surprisingly happy ending did nothing to quieten his fears. If anyth he was more uneasy than before. He had given the sergeant a wr name, and trouble might come of that. He had another shock the lowing night during the performance, when he was at the top of little ladder working the light. Jerry Jerningham had just kicked h legs in the air when Mr. Oakroyd noticed a policeman's helmet bobb about in the wings. He nearly fell off the ladder. They had found h He was free to descend now but he stopped where he was, in the h that the policeman might overlook him. The next moment, however was looking down on the policeman's upturned face.

"Finished up there?"

"Ay," said Mr. Oakroyd reluctantly.

"Just come down a minute then," said the policeman. At every he expected to find the policeman's hand grasping his collar. It horrible.

"They said you'd be the feller to tell me," said the policeman amia indeed quite apologetically. " 'Ave to 'ave a look round, yer kn uncil here's very particular. Fire and all that. Won't take a minute, t I've to ask a question or two." And he pulled out a notebook and mediately looked grave and important.

Mr. Oakroyd breathed again. "Owt I can tell you, I will, mate," he d earnestly, with the air of a man who was ready to put out a fire h his own hands.

The worst of it was that you never knew when you were safe even an hour. The most innocent things suddenly became sinister, menac-g. Thus, on Saturday morning, his landlady, Mrs. Mason, whose hus-nd was a porter at Long and Passbury's, the auctioneers, told Mr. kroyd at breakfast-time that he must make sure of being in to tea. 's Milly's birthday today," she announced, "and we're having a bit of pread and we want you to join us, if it's not asking too much. And lly's young chap's coming too. You'll like 'im, a bit of good company is. Six o'clock we're 'aving it becos that's as soon as he can get here."

Mr. Oakroyd liked nothing better than such festive occasions. Not y did he promise to be there but he arranged to get two tickets for show that night for Milly and her young man, of whom he had rd vaguely but had never seen, as a birthday present. At half-past e he was in the parlour, listening, with a show of interest for once, the ponderous talk of Mr. Mason, a very slow and solemn man, not fond of work. Mr. Mason seemed to think this was a suitable ment to discuss his attitude towards religion. "Give me a bit of hool," he was saying. "I likes a bit of ritchool, Mr. Oakroyd," when daughter Milly, a big bouncing girl who earned good money at the ve factory and had no respect for her father, blew in like a coloured l scented gale and told him to "dry up about his old ritchool." Mr. kroyd wished her many happy returns and handed over the tickets. r this he was soundly kissed, for he was in favour with Milly, who ed to think she was in touch with theatrical life and had retailed Mr. kroyd's gossip to some profit during the week to the other girls at glove factory. Then Mrs. Mason, crimson, shining, and unfamiliar in best, bustled in and said that tea was ready when they were.

Tom's not 'ere yet," said Milly. "We'll wait. If he keeps us much ger, he'll 'ear from me when 'e does come."

"Don't let 'im 'ear too much from you, Miss," said her mother, d lighted at such a spirit but not above giving a warning.

"She'll get 'er master yet in Tom," Mr. Mason observed ponderous "Or if she don't, then I'm surprised. 'E's big enough."

Tom was big enough. He was nearly six foot, very straight, ve broad in the shoulders. He had a red face, a small clipped moustac a twinkling eye, and any amount of jaw. In his new grey suit, he look both stalwart and trim, and he was the kind of young fellow that M Oakroyd at any other time would have taken to at once, but now som how he did not like the look of him. There was something unpleasa about the way in which he marched in, heavy on his feet.

"Comes in as if he's going to lock us all up," cried Milly, asking the all with her eyes to admire him.

"Well, you be careful then, my girl," said Tom with mock gruffne And then he and Milly laughed, and Mr. Mason and Mrs. Mas laughed. Mr. Oakroyd did not laugh; he only smiled vaguely; he w feeling rather uneasy. Tom had heard about him and the troupe, a was very pleased to meet him. Mr. Oakroyd said he was very pleas too, and tried to looked pleased, especially after he had had his ha almost pulped. They went in to tea.

Mr. Oakroyd brightened up at the sight of the tea. There was boil ham; there was tinned salmon, with vinegar; there was even jam past it was a proper knife-and-fork, company tea that Bruddersford its would not have despised. It reminded him of old times at home. A then no sooner had they got sat down than Mr. Mason spoilt it all.

"Well, Tom," said Mr. Mason, "arrested anybody lately? 'E's in t Force, Tom is," he added, turning to Mr. Oakroyd.

Mr. Oakroyd nodded, and felt himself turning all colours. This w a nice mess he had landed himself into, having to eat all this tea rig under a bobby's nose. "Best thing tha can do, lad," he told hims desperately, "is to car quiet, say nowt." And this was easy enough f a time, while Milly and her Tom were busy chaffing one another, b after that there was no escape for him. Grateful for the tickets a anxious to be polite, Tom insisted upon talking to him, asking hi questions.

"Where did you say you came from?" said Tom.

eeds," said Mr. Oakroyd.

thought you said it was Bruddersford the other day, Mr. Oakroyd," l Mrs. Mason.

t's all t'same," replied Mr. Oakroyd. "You can't tell where one ends t'other begins." Nothing could be further from the truth, he knew, this, but it might pass among these strangers. Indeed, strangers actually visited the West Riding were inclined to take such views, g one endless town where natives could see half a dozen entirely rent and warring communities.

Ve don't often get 'em from your part down here," said Tom re-vely. "Funny thing, though, there's another chap just come here 's from your part, judging by your talk. Our sergeant was telling bout him. He was the very spit image of a little bookie that used here called Jimmy Pearson——"

ve 'eard of him," said Mr. Mason with great solemnity.

o the sarge follered him round to have a word with him, and then rns out it wasn't the same feller——"

ase o' mistaken identity you'd call that in the Force, wouldn't you?" Mr. Mason with even greater solemnity. "Ar, I thought so. Mis-n identity, that's what they'd call it, Ma."

ancy!" cried Mrs. Mason. "Let me give you another cup of tea, . Pass the stewed pears to Mr. Oakroyd, Pa."

nd this little feller came from Yorkshire the same as yourself," Tom, who was not the man to leave a tale half finished. "Same of name too. The sarge did say what it was. Og—something or ."

'ud be Ogden," announced Mr. Mason complacently. "Know the well. I've sold at least two up in my time."

o, it wasn't Ogden," said Tom. Then he looked at Mr. Oakroyd. vas longer than Ogden. A real Yorkshire sort of name, it was. ught you might know the name. You might know the man. Our ant said it was a bit fishy the way this feller kept getting out of his at first, but he thinks everything's fishy, he does. That's the way get to be sergeants."

don't like a suspicious nature," cried Milly. "Don't you ever 'ave a cious nature, Tom, whatever you do."

This seemed to Mr. Oakroyd a very sensible remark. He himself t to convey the impression that he could not be bothered with anyth at that moment but stewed pears and custard and brown bread butter. But he was not to be left alone.

"I was wondering if you might know this Og—something ch Tom said to him.

He shook his head. "I've not heard tell of another Yorkshire c here, but there may be onny number of 'em for all I knaw."

Mr. Mason had been ruminating and now he pronounced judgm "Tom won't 'ave a suspicious nature. Tom'll be too easy-going, th be his trouble."

"No, it won't," cried Milly. "Will it, Tom?"

"He'll be there when he's wanted," said Mrs. Mason. "Pass your c up while it's nice and hot."

"I've got eyes in my head," said Tom, and as he said this his wandered round the table and seemed to come to rest significantly Mr. Oakroyd, who was so disturbed by it that half the pear he cutting with his spoon suddenly shot off his plate and landed am the lemon-cheese tarts.

"Eh, dear!" cried Mr. Oakroyd. "Look what I'm doing."

"You'll 'ave to be given in charge, Mr. Oakroyd," said Mr. M waggishly. "Here's a case for you, Tom. Damaging tarts wit pear."

They laughed at this, and Mr. Mason, thus encouraged, immedi took charge of the conversation. "And joking apart, quite apart," began, just as if there were all manner of humourous diversions g forward elsewhere in the house, "mentioning no names and inten no offence, I say it's time there were a few more cases in this to Yes, and in other towns, a lot of other towns. And I know what talking about——"

"No you don't, Pa," said his daughter. "Shut up."

"And mind your elbow," said his wife. "Here, move that custard he'll have it over in a minute."

"There's people walking about the streets today," Mr. Mason c tinued, "that ought to be serving their time in gaol. Hundreds of don't know when we're rubbing up against 'em. Isn't that so, Mr. kroyd? You know that."

Ar d'you mean?" cried Mr. Oakroyd, startled.

Take no notice of 'im, Mr. Oakroyd," said his hostess. "And make ood tea. You're not eating anything."

No offence and only in a manner of speaking," said Mr. Mason ndiosely. "My meaning is that you're a man who sees the world, 're knocking about; like meself, and you know it as well as I do. nted men, that's wot they are, and walking about the streets today ree as me and you, Mr. Oakroyd. If I'd my way——"

If you'd your way," cried Milly, "we'd all be in a mess next minute. nning down the police like that! Now you tell him something, n."

That's right," said her mother. "Give Tom a chance. And give Oakroyd a piece of sandwich cake. He's eating nothing."

Well, I don't say we can work miracles," said Tom, though he said vith the air of a man who might manage one or two if he tried. "We 't and it isn't to be expected. But we know more than you people ık we know. We can't pick a needle out of a haystack. And we 't afford to make mistakes."

Course you can't, Tom," said Mrs. Mason, who apparently had given matter a great deal of thought. "Pass your father's cup, Milly."

e done nicely," said Mr. Mason. "I want to listen."

Put it this way, then," Tom continued. "Supposing you're wanted something, Mr. Mason——"

Don't take me, Tom. I'm too easy. Anybody knows where to find in this town. I'm there at Long and Passbury's, have been for nty years. It's money for nothing if it's me you're after. Take Mr. kroyd 'ere. He's on the move. Nobody knows anything about 'im."

There's plenty knaws all about me," Mr. Oakroyd protested indigtly. What did this fool of a chap want to drag him in for! And couldn't they change the subject! Surely they had been at it long ugh!

All right," said Tom, "we'll take Mr. Oakroyd here. He's wanted. ou see?" He looked very fierce and suddenly pointed a finger at the unhappy Mr. Oakroyd. “You’re wanted. We’re after you.” Mason family laughed heartily at this by-play.

Mr. Oakroyd had had enough of this. It might have been t advantage to learn what happened when men were wanted, bu simply could not sit there any longer. “Half a minute,” he cried, ge to his feet. “What’s time?”

“Only ten to,” Mrs. Mason told him. “ You’ve ample time, Mr. royd. You said this morning you wouldn’t have to set off until qu past seven.”

“Ay, I didn’t knaw then,” he muttered. “I’ve a right lot to do on i’ the-ater. I mun be off, Mrs. Mason.” He departed to wash self, leaving the others to rise from the table at their leisure.

Just as he was opening the front door, a heavy hand fell on shoulder. He jumped. “Eh!” he gasped, and turned round. It Tom, looking a policeman every inch of him.

“Look out for us tonight, Mr. Oakroyd,” said Tom heartily. “Y hear us clapping. And thanks for the tickets.”

“By gow! you made me jump,” cried Mr. Oakroyd, and hurried a He was determined that this Tom should not clap eyes on him a that night or any other night. He felt miserable. What with the sal and the pears and the sandwich cake and all the shocks he had ha felt queer inside.

“Good house tonight,” said Jimmy Nunn. “Winstead’s been a date. I’m sorry to leave it.”

“Well, you can have it for me,” Mr. Oakroyd told him. “I re nowt o’ t’place.”

“Why, what’s wrong with it?”

“Iv’rything,” he replied bitterly, and went about his business.

IV

Mr. Oakroyd felt that he could not go on much longer: his secret weighing him down. “I mun tell somebody,” he admitted to him “or I’ll be going right clean off me dot.” Some of the others were ginning to ask what was the matter with him. Jimmy Nunn though had the look of a man on the fringe—just on the mere fringe stomach trouble: one who “would know about it later on.” Susie e was homesick, pining for a sight of Bruddersford. Joe simply shook is head. It was a bad business. Mr. Oakroyd felt ashamed of himself e would have to tell somebody but he could not bring himself to do it, nd felt worse every day.

They were now at Haxby, playing at The Kursaal, a horribly draughty uilding that had once been a small roller-skating rink. The audiences ere not bad, though apt to be restive and noisy at the back. The town self, they all agreed, was hateful; a dark and dirty place, full of empty utchers' shops and men without collars who stood about waiting for e racing specials; and they complained of their lodgings, which were l smelly and uncomfortable, haunted by long-lost cabbages and prickly ith old horsehair furniture. It was one of those places in which there nothing to do during the day. They all hung about or went for tless walks or did some mending or tried to find cheerful company er a bottle of Guiness, and were glad when it was time to walk round the stage door.

Haxby did not give Mr. Oakroyd any of the shocks that Winstead had ovided, but it seemed to depress him even more. There was someing so dark and slinking about it. And his landlady, an elderly oman with a long yellow face, was not at all friendly but appeared to atch his every movement with suspicion. Nobody was better pleased an he was when Haxby was shut out, the lights turned up on the ge, and Inigo was rattling away on the piano, but even at the theatre ey noticed he was out of spirits.

On Thursday night, however, he was a changed man. It was Inigo ho remarked it first. "Only another three nights in this hole, thank od!" he said, as they were standing together in the wings before the ow began. "Every time I come here I pass fifteen little butchers' shops d every one has nothing but an old old leg of mutton in the window. an't see them again, I really can't. They turn me up, absolutely, espelly as I'm still finishing their elder brother at my digs. Gosh! what town!"

"Nay," Mr. Oakroyd protested, "it's noan so bad as all that. It's not lace I'd like to come to for my holidays, but I've seen waar places ner is i' me time." His voice had quite a new ring in it.

"Hello, hello!" cried Inigo, staring at him. "What's happened to you, Master Oakroyd? Why are you now our little ray of sunshine? Ther mystery here."

Mr. Oakroyd seemed rather confused. "Nay, nowt's happene much."

"Come, come, this won't do," said Inigo. "You have a hidden li There must be fairies at the bottom of your garden, as Mrs. Joe poi out sometimes in the key of E flat. What's happened?"

"Nowt—only I met a chap from Bruddersford today."

"Ah—so that's it," said Inigo. "Do you hear that, Joe? Master O royd's himself again because he's met a fellow Bruddersfordian on t desert trail. Let the word go round, and song and cheer be all what's its name." And the word did go round, with the result that Oakroyd was thoroughly chaffed all the rest of the night. Undoubte they said, the little man had been homesick.

Mr. Oakroyd did not care what they said. He had a welcoming gr for them all. He was happy again, haunted and hunted no longer. chance meeting that afternoon had wakened him out of his bad drea

After dinner (a bad one), he had gone for a stroll round the m streets of the town, smoking his *Old Salt* and wondering whether would be worth while having a glass of ale before the pubs closed the afternoon. Outside the *White Hart,* the largest pub in the pla he had noticed a little car and there had seemed something famil about it even at a distance. As soon as he was close enough to see th the back seat of this car had been converted into a kind of large b Mr. Oakroyd recognised it at once. He knew that car well for had spent a whole day working on it. That box arrangement (to h samples) was nothing less than his own handiwork. And there w the Bruddersford registration letters. That car was the one used Mr. Ashworth, one of Higden's travellers. Mr. Ashworth was probab inside the *White Hart,* where he would be giving a good account himself, at that very moment.

(And let it be said here and now that this encounter with Mr. As worth does not involve any undue stretching of the arm of coinciden Those who imagine it does are simply living in ignorance, not bei acquainted with the West Riding trade. Every week, travellers, lo men with broad shoulders and broader vowels, leave Bruddersford it all the towns in this island, to cross the seas to Gothenburg, Amster-m, Antwerp, Lille, and Milan, to sail round the globe itself and pop in Sydney or Buenos Aires. Higden's is one of the largest firms in uddersford, and you might meet a man from Higden's anywhere and any moment.)

Then Mr. Oakroyd had an inspiration. He would tell his tale to r. Ashworth, who had always had a word for him and was un-ubtedly a chap with a head on his shoulders. He entered the *White art*. Mr. Ashworth was not in the bar and not in the Smoke Room, ich meant that he was not downstairs at all, for he was not one of ur taproom men. While Mr. Oakroyd was hesitating, he was asked at he wanted, and was then told that one gent was still having his nch in the coffee-room upstairs. That was Mr. Ashworth. Mr. Oak-yd found him in a corner of the deserted room, eating cheese and scuits and looking idly at a newspaper.

Mr. Ashworth, a big man with a vast expanse of red cheeks, several ins, and prominent light blue eyes, glanced towards the approaching gure of Mr. Oakroyd, then stared at him. "Here," he called out, "I low you, don't I?"

"That's right, Mr. Ashworth," said the other, walking up. "How u're getting on?"

"Why, it's Oakroyd! What are you doing here? I heard you got opped at Higden's. Dam' shame too, the time you'd been there! Here, you down."

But Mr. Oakroyd first explained how he came to be in Haxby at all, d then said, in conclusion: "And I'd like to tell you about summat at's been right bothering me, Mr. Ashworth, if you wouldn't mind."

Mr. Ashworth, who had probably been rather bored, did not mind all. "But we're not stopping here, lad," he said. "We'll find a corner ownstairs and have one. Then we can talk in comfort." And they ent downstairs, had a double whisky and a pint put before them, and en Mr. Oakroyd plunged into his tale, beginning with his adventures ith George, the night before he left Bruddersford, and ending with eonard's letter. "And, as you see for yersen, Mr. Ashworth," he con-uded, "I've done nowt—nobbut tearing up me card, that is—but what wi' one thing and t'other it looked to me as if I hadn't got a leg stand on."

"But how did they come to be looking for you in Bruddersford the other enquired.

"All through that big daft George business," replied Mr. Oakroy "That's t'only thing that could ha' started 'em. This bobby, you se Mr. Ashworth, tells me not to foller this George, and he sees me face ar he knaws where I live, Ogden Street, 'cos I told him. Nah then, whe this chap, George, says after that he's been robbed, this bobby remembers me and begins making a few enquiries like, and they find out I'v taken me hook all of a sudden and that starts 'em off."

Mr. Ashworth looked at his downcast face for a minute then burst int a sudden and startling roar of laughter. "Well, I'll be damned! Na Oakroyd, lad! That was George Jobley, wasn't it?"

"Ay, that's t'name. Do yer knaw him?"

"Know him! T-t-t——" Mr. Ashworth went on making this t-t- noise for about two minutes. "I'd be a sight better off if I didn't kno him. He's had many a quid of mine for something that didn't run o couldn't run. But I remember that business. It was all nowt. He wa in the rats. He's never lost any hundred and twenty pound, not h and he admitted it after. That's the bit they never put in the pape of course."

"D'you mean to say," demanded Mr. Oakroyd, "t'police hasn't tak' t'case up?"

"I should think I do mean to say it. Case! There isn't enough cas to make a pigeon egg. If you've been fancying yourself as one of thes chaps they're all looking for and can't catch, you can stop this minute I don't care what your lad wrote, it's all nowt. He's been reading penny bloods."

"Are you sure, Mr. Ashworth?"

"Certain. You can go and walk up and down Woolgate all day to-morrow, and I'll give you five bob for every time the police look twice at you. Nay," he concluded in his broadest accent, "they've summat better to do than bother wi' thee, lad."

"Well, by gow! you've tak'n a load off my mind, Mr. Ashworth," cried Mr. Oakroyd fervently, "you have an' all! It's been spoiling t'best o I ivver had. Eh, I don't knaw I'm born nar." He rubbed his hands, ished his pint, then relit his pipe. When he saw that his companion d also finished his drink, he said earnestly: "Nah you'll ha' one wi' e, Mr. Ashworth. You've right set me up."

Five minutes later, deep in his second pint, he observed happily: "You aw, Mr. Ashworth, when I tinkered up that car o' yours, I nivver owt I'd soon be a bit i' t'same line mesen. But we're both on t'road, en't we?" He smoked luxuriously for a minute, and then added: nd nah there's summat I've been meaning to ask you all along and mun do it afore I forget." He took a pull at his beer and looked eculatively at his companion over the top of his glass.

"How's that new centre forrard doing for t'United?"

Mr. Oakroyd was himself again.

Chapter Five

INIGO JUMPS OUT OF A TRAIN AND FINDS HIMSELF LOVE

I

Now this," said Mrs. Joe impressively, taking up the last little h of cards, "is what's sure to come true."

"What was all the rest then?" Inigo asked.

"Look here, Inigo," cried Susie, "whose fortune is this, mine or you You're not a bit funny. Go on, my dear. Don't take any notice of hi

Mrs. Joe was examining the cards with sibylline gravity. "I see h great success for you, my dear. Money, admiration, power, everythin a really great success. And it'll come quite unexpectedly in a Five."

"Five what? Can't you tell?"

"No, it's just a Five. And it'll all come through a dark man, a v dark man."

"Perhaps it's a nigger," suggested Jimmy Nunn.

"Oh, shut up, Jimmy!" cried Susie. "You're old enough to know b ter. How am I going to meet this man? That's what I want to kno

"Talking of niggers," said Mr. Morton Mitcham to nobody in parti lar, "I was in New Orleans one time and there was an old nig mammy there who could tell fortunes. She did it with melon see She told me I was going to break my arm within a week. 'Don't you to de North or de West, sah,' she said to me. But I did, though. A just a week after that, in Nashville——" He paused and looked fr one to another of them.

Joe took his pipe out of his mouth. "You broke your arm, like s said," he prompted.

"No, I didn't do just that," said Mr. Mitcham solemnly, "and I wo pretend I did. But just one week after that I was with a fellow—a I'll tell you who he was; he was old Horace Carson who used to go rou h the *Woman in a Barrel* illusion— and he broke his leg. Queer, n't it? And another time, out East, there was an old Chink ——"

Well, Susie, you can't want a better fortune than that, my dear," l Mrs. Joe. "You'll have a lot of worries and trouble in a Two, as id, but after that everything's going to be bright for you, and I'm sure ish I could say the same for us all."

Don't you think you could if you tried hard enough?" asked Inigo, king innocent.

There he goes again!" cried Susie. "Pretending he thinks it's all nsense, and all the time he's dying to have a good fortune himself and urious because he can't have one."

Don't be a scoffer, Mr. Jollifant," said Mrs. Joe earnestly. "I've known ple to scoff at these things once too often, like that young fellow who ne to the Rawston Repertory when we were there. What was his ne, Joe?" she called across to him.

What was whose name?" asked Joe.

That young fellow who came to the Rawston and who'd once been a lawyer's office or somewhere and didn't believe in bad luck and good k and all that."

Oh, that chap," said Joe. "I remember him well. Best solo whist yer I ever struck, he was. Knew every card in your hand. I remem- him all right."

What was his name?" screamed his wife. "Don't keep telling me u remember him. All I want is his name."

oe thought for a moment. "I've forgotten his name," he confessed.

'Just like you, Joe," and she dismissed him with affectionate scorn.

hat's Joe all over," she explained to the others at her end of the npartment. "He'd keep on for an hour telling me he remembered n, if I'd let him, and then he doesn't even remember the man's name. ell, as I was saying, this young fellow came to the company and told all there was too much of this superstition on the stage and he didn't ieve in it, and to show us he didn't believe in it, he went out of his y to do all the things that bring bad luck, and put things in the dress- g-room, spoke the tag at rehearsals, and everything. He'd show us it s all rubbish, he said. Well, what came of it?" She asked this in ow thrilling voice and fixed her gaze upon Inigo.

"Well, did anything come of it?" asked Inigo, who felt that he capable of following this young man's example himself.

"I should think it did," cried Mrs. Joe triumphantly. "He had notice in less than a month."

"Served him right, too," said Susie very severely. "But how di happen?"

"Oh, we all complained to the management about him," replied M Joe. "Either he goes or we do, we said, and so he had to go." S stared at Inigo, who had suddenly burst out laughing. "Funny to y it may be, Mr. Jollifant, but it wasn't funny to us and it went to hearts to have to do it but we couldn't have him deliberately ruining luck for everybody. And he brought on his own bad luck, didn't h

"But don't you see——" Inigo began, but then stopped because it obvious that she did not see. Moreover, Susie was telling him to be qu and not to talk about things he did not understand.

"Ai don't believe mech in these things," Mr. Jerry Jerningham nounced, fluttering his long eyelashes at the company.

"You don't believe in anything," said Miss Longstaff, who appear to have wakened up specially to make this remark. "All you beli in is yourself and White's dancing shoes and that stuff that says han some men are slightly sunburnt." It was clear that Mr. Jerningh could not be numbered among Elsie's gentlemen friends.

"Dewn't you be so personal," said Mr. Jerningham, permitting his quisite features to register indignation. "You're always passing remawk And Ai know whai. Oh yes, Ai know whai." There was—as the ladi told one another afterwards—bouquet written all over him.

Susie began chanting a little composition of her own:

"Pretty Mister Jerningham
Came from Birmingham,
Where he'd been learning 'em,
And some say turning 'em
Up up up."

"Now then, you girls," said Jimmy, "leave the boy alone. You're on jealous. If there's no more fortune-telling going on at that end, we have the cards back, please. What about another game of solo, Joe

t's getting quite warm in here," Mr. Mitcham observed, and began
ng off his overcoat.

Exit the Silver King," murmured Susie. This was the name they
given Mr. Mitcham's overcoat, which was no ordinary garment.
ad first made its appearance at Haxby (where Mr. Mitcham had
ght it in a second-hand clothier's for twenty-eight shillings), and
ediately it had seemed as if another person had joined the party.
Mitcham was now described as "travelling an overcoat," just as
e players are said to "travel" a mother or other relative. It was a
ntic plaid ulster and its collar was decorated with a few inches of
from some mysterious and long extinct species. It had the air of
ng been round the world far more times than Mr. Mitcham himself,
of having seen places that its owner would never be permitted to
At any moment (as Inigo had remarked), you felt that this astound-
overcoat might begin to supplement Mr. Mitcham's travel reminis-
es or set him right in a loud voice. And Jimmy Nunn swore that
ad to take out an extra railway ticket for it and that every time it
taken into a third-class carriage its fur stood on end. Such was
Silver King, which Mr. Mitcham now folded and, after some diffi-
, found a place for on the rack.

ter Haxby *The Good Companions* had had several three-night
two-night stands in the same neighbourhood, and it was now the
lle of November. This Sunday journey to Middleford was the
est they had undertaken so far, for Middleford, as everybody ought
now, is one of those grim coal-and-iron towns of the North-East.
Trant had taken Mr. Oakroyd with her in the car, on which he
kept a knowing eye, but all the other eight of them, as we have
were travelling in this train and they filled the compartment. They
been there for the last three hours, exchanging stories, playing cards,
g fortunes, eating sandwiches and chocolate, reading, smoking,
ing, dozing, staring out of the windows at the vague grey places
went wobbling past. It was a raw day—and, as usual, seemed all
more raw because it was Sunday—and at first the railway carriage
been miserably cold, but now it was not merely snug but down-
stuffy. Jimmy Nunn, Joe, Mitcham, and Jerningham played a
more languid hands of solo whist; Mrs. Joe knitted; Elsie closed her

eyes again; Susie read a few more pages of *The Pianola Mystery;* Inigo wrestled with several large Sunday newspapers.

"Hello!" said Jimmy, wiping the window and peering out. "T looks like Hicklefield. We're running to time today."

"Don't we change here?" asked Inigo.

"We *do*," Jimmy replied. "And we've just twenty minutes. T to get a drink."

"Everybody changes here," said Mrs. Joe, putting away her knitt "I seem to have spent half my life in this station. Every time I've gone North, they've run me into Hicklefield to change trains."

The others agreed that Hicklefield was inevitable, and told one other how often they had met people they knew in the refreshment-ro They were now running slowly into the gloomy cavern of the sta itself. Then a curious thing happened. Jimmy Nunn, who had down the window and was looking out, gave a little cry and then s denly sat down in his corner.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he grasped, staring before him. All the col had drained out of his queer puckered face. He looked ill.

"Jimmy! Jimmy! What's the matter?" they were all crying.

He was pressing his hand now on his heart. His lips were b "All right. It's nothing," he groaned. "Just a bit of—of—an attack, th all. Get me—that bag down—ol' man—you'll find a flask in it. Th it. Ah—that's better!" The colour returned to his face, beginning w his nose, so that for a moment or two he looked as if he had his co make-up on and there seemed a horrible touch of drollery in his chattering teeth.

"Jimmy, my dear!" said Susie, her hand on his shoulder. "Wh happened? You did give me a fright. Don't do it again, will you?"

There was no time for more. The train had stopped now. In and Morton Mitcham said they would see the baggage into the next tr which was already waiting at a neighbouring platform. The oth were going off at once to the refreshment-room, but Jimmy, who w still shaky, refused to accompany them, so Susie insisted upon taki him over to the Middleford train. But when Inigo had finished with baggage, he found Jimmy sitting there alone.

"Where's Susie?" he asked.

packed her off to get a cup o' tea for herself," Jimmy replied. "Is ham trying for a quick one?"

He is," said Inigo, helping the porter with the smaller things, which were spreading on the seats. "There's still ten minutes, but I'm going to bother. I don't like these lightning drinks."

fter a few minutes, Joe and his wife came along, announcing that had seen and spoken with Tommy Verney and Mabel Ross, late *he Merry Mascots.* "They're resting now," panted Mrs. Joe, "then ing at Warrington in *Cinderella*—Baron Hardup and Dandini."

n Elsie and Jerry Jerningham disengaged themselves from a group eople (the *Money for Dust!* Company on the Broadhead Tour) at the of the platform, and came hurrying along, chanting the names of he acquaintances they had seen. Then Mr. Morton Mitcham, magent in the Silver King, stalked up, to point out that he had had two e some fellows, there before he was, had not been able to secure a le drink. "It's an art as much as anything else," he concluded trihantly, and Jimmy and Joe acknowledged that he was undoubtedly st worker.

Where's Susie?" asked Inigo.

r. Mitcham thought he had seen her in the refreshment-room, talking me people. "There's three minutes yet," he added. "She can make asy. Did I ever tell you how I once caught the Twentieth Century ited?"

t this moment, however, a porter slammed the door. Jimmy and Joe both tried to look out of the window at the same time. "By !" cried Jimmy anxiously, "but she'll have to hurry up. I can't see and they're getting their flags and whistles ready."

ust a minute!" said Inigo. "Do let me have a look."

an't see her anywhere," said Jimmy.

whistle sounded.

here she is!" cried Jimmy. "Eh, what's your name, guard?—half a ute! Oh, the silly devils! Gosh, we're off! She's missed it!"

hen so have I," roared Inigo. "Get back, Jimmy. I'm getting out."

train was actually moving now, though very slowly. He opened door, dropped out, and fell flat on his back on the platform.

nmy fumbled desperately in his pocket while the others were shouting. "Here!" he cried. "Tickets!" He threw out two tickets, whic on the platform and were picked up by a porter, whose attentio then directed to Inigo by the frantic gesticulations of Jimmy. Th moment they were out of the station.

"Well I'll be——" Joe did not say what he would be, but s blew out his breath. The others, however, appeared to agree with "For the minute," said Mrs. Joe, "I didn't know I'd a heart in my b

"Well, I've thought for some time he was sweet on Susie," said "but I didn't know it was as bad as that."

"I've seen it all along," said Mrs. Joe, with a huge sentimental "That's what I call love, that is."

"Oh, he's gone on her, is he?" said Joe, staring innocently at his "Is that why he went and jumped out?"

"Of course it is, Joe. Don't be silly," said his wife sharply. "An needn't look so surprised about it. He hasn't gone wrong in his If I was stranded like that, you'd jump out of a train, wouldn't you

Joe rubbed his chin and looked bewildered. "I suppose so," he finally.

"You don't seem very sure about it."

"All right then, I would," said Joe. "You try me and see."

"And then go and break your neck, I suppose," said his wife, sharply. "And then we'd be in a fine mess, wouldn't we? I've heard a man talk in such a silly way as you do sometimes, Joe," she cluded severely.

Joe looked at her in despair. Then he looked at Mr. Morton Mitc who in his turn was looking at Jimmy. All three gentlemen excha glances, and they were glances of a deep philosophical significance, as may be exchanged among members of a sex not entirely devoi reason, not wholly given over to whims and fancies and irrational bursts.

II

"And did you really jump out just to keep me company?" said S "I think it's sweet of you, Inigo."

Inigo himself, though he did not say so, thought it was rather s of him too. He had just been admonished by the North-Eastern had still a good deal of that railway's dust on his clothes, and had uite recovered from his encounter with that railway's platform. The had handed over the two tickets that Jimmy had thrown out, but had neither overcoat nor hat, and felt chilly, shaken up and some- ridiculous.

e very first thing we must do now," said Susie rather sternly, just e had proposed a few games of chess, "is to find out when the next goes to Middleford."

s, I'd thought of that myself," said Inigo meekly.

ether, they examined the indicator, which informed them that the rain to Middleford would leave No. 2 Platform at 7.45 P.M.

er four hours to wait here," said Inigo.

d when will it arrive at Middleford?" asked Susie. "That's what sn't say. About the crack of dawn, I suppose."

e time-table over there will tell us that," said Inigo, and led her ds it. After much pointing and running up and down of fingers, iscovered that the 7.45 arrived in Middleford at 11 o'clock.

at'll be all right," said Susie. "Jimmy or one of the others will e to meet us. They'll look up the train too, and they'll have got e digs. This isn't the first time this has happened to me, as Jimmy ll you."

e she was stopped by a cough. It came from a middle-aged woman d in black who had been glancing at the time-table next to theirs. d a long angular face, and her lips were tightly compressed. Inigo oticed her when they first came up, for she was looking at the time- s if there might be something wildly indecent in it. And now she ed, not apologetically but peremptorily; it was like a tap on the ler. They looked at her, and she looked steadily from one to the of them.

ybe you're theatricals?" she asked at last.

they were.

anging trains here?" she asked.

nging and losing trains, they told her, and then exchanged quick s. "Busybody?" Inigo's glance asked. "Probably looking for lod- Susie's replied.

d when did you come in?" she enquired. After they had told her

that too, and had even indicated the direction of the train, she loo
them more fixedly than ever, and finally said: "You don't happen t
been travelling with a Mr. Nunn?"

"What, Jimmy Nunn!" cried Susie.

"James Nunn," she replied firmly.

"I should think we were," said Susie. "We're all in the same
The Good Companions. And Jimmy's an old friend of mine.
know him?"

The angular woman paid no attention to this question. "
troupe, is it?" she said. "And where are you going to now?"

Middleford, they told her.

"And where to next week?" she asked.

This was very puzzling. Susie looked at Inigo and hesitated. "
if you want to know," said Inigo, in that special no-concern-of
voice we always employ with that opening phrase, "we're goin
place called Tewborough."

"Not far from here," said the woman.

"We're playing at the Theatre Royal there," said Susie, not w
pride.

"Humph. Not much good'll come o' that," she said grimly, lo
still more angular. "What is it you call yourselves? *Good Compa*
And you're sure Mr. Nunn's with you, are you?"

"Of course we are," replied Susie, rather indignantly. "We sh
him tonight or tomorrow morning. D'you know him? Can w
him a message?"

"James Nunn'll want no message from me. I saw him on that
and if I'm not mistaken he saw me." She looked hard at them
then gave herself a little shake. "I'm his wife," she said quietly
began walking away.

Inigo stared. Susie gasped, then ran forward. "I say, though,
cried, stopping the woman, "how extraordinary! I've known Ji
for ages and never knew——"

"He'd a wife. No, I'll be bound you didn't."

"But listen! I'm Susie Dean, and Jimmy used to know my
very well."

"And I knew him too," said this astonishing Mrs. Nunn quite ca ight have known you were Charlie Dean's girl, for you've the look im."

But how wonderful!" cried Susie. She was almost dancing with tement.

s it?"

Of course it is."

Why?" said Mrs. Nunn, without the least flicker of interest. "I don't it wonderful. It takes more than that to surprise me. Good after- n."

But surely you're not going away just like that," said Susie. "I mean, *aying* anything at all. You simply can't go like that."

rs. Nunn gave her a long level stare. "What is it you want to w?" she demanded.

Well, it isn't exactly that I want to *know* anything," Susie explained, you see—meeting you like this——"

Without any intention of being rude and while thanking you for vering any questions I might have asked," said Mrs. Nunn, in a angular voice, "I must tell you that you're a good deal too excitable. get out of the habit of working yourself up about nothing or it'll on you, Miss. And that's all there is to it. Good afternoon." And narched off without another word.

Well, of all the dried-up, bony, beastly women!" cried Susie, rejoin- nigo, who had hung back. "Did you hear her?"

mmy saw her," Inigo announced. "He saw her on the platform he was looking out of the window. Don't you remember how he went?"

nd no wonder!" said Susie. "But isn't it strange? I never knew d a wife." And for several minutes she exclaimed at this discovery then sketched in various accounts of Jimmy's past, in all of which ame was attached to him.

e've heard of the skeleton in the cupboard," said Inigo meditatively.

nd she's it," Susie put in quickly. "And now we won't talk any about her. The point is, where are we going?" They were now f the station and had wandered into what was presumably one of nain streets of the town.

this is Hicklefield," said Inigo, looking about him with distaste and shivering a little. "Methinks the air doth not smell wooingly my Sue. In fact the place gives me the hump, absolutely."

There was a light fog over the town. The shuttered shops and b and warehouses were vague shapes and like the scenery of some di dream. Cars came sliding from nowhere, twisted this way and hooted like wounded monsters, then slipped away into nothing Ponderous trams loomed up, creaking and groaning, stopped to sw a few morsels of humanity, and lumbered off to unimaginable pl A policeman, an antique taxicab, a man with newspapers, a woma an imitation sealskin coat, and a few other persons and things, standing there, apparently waiting for Doomsday to break. Not broke the grey monotony but the pavement itself, which was startli black in its grime. There was no colour, no sparkle of life, anyw

"My God!" cried Inigo. "Let's get out of this, Susie. Another ute of this and I give up hope."

"We'll jump on that tram," she said, pointing, "and see what hap Come on." They raced down the street and boarded the tram just was moving off, to the delight of the conductor, who plainly had expected anything at all to happen that afternoon. The top of the was covered, and they climbed up there and sat in a curved little in front.

"Now this is much better," said Susie, peeping out at a mo Hicklefield.

"Isn't it?" he replied. "Like being on a galleon."

But he was not looking at Hicklefield but at Susie herself, who se more vivid and radiant than ever, and as he looked at her he f himself possessed by a most curious feeling, a kind of ache, made u wild happiness and sickly excitement. He realised at once that place, the front of this tram in Hicklefield, was the only place in world for him, and when he thought of other places, where there no Susie, from the Savoy Grill to the sunlit beaches of Hawaii, appeared to be nothing but desolations. He realised in a flash th would be better even to be miserable with her than to be anyw else, for so long as she was there the world would still be enchan whereas if she were not there it would be a mere dark huddle of th He knew now he was in love with her, and would go on being in her for ever and ever. This was it, there could be no mistake. He jumped out of the train simply because he could not bear being out her; he had jumped and had fallen, head over heels over head heels, in love.

usie," he said, "I say, Susie." And then he stopped. His voice ded ridiculous, like the bleating of a sheep.

Vell, Inigo?" Her dark eyes were fixed upon his for a moment, suddenly their expression changed. She was looking at the conduc- who was now standing at Inigo's elbow. They asked him where could go, if there was any chance of getting tea at the journey's end, ie told them that about half a mile or so beyond the terminus there a fine big hotel, standing on a main road and largely patronised notterists." It was, they gathered, a most sumptuous establishment, Inigo decided at once that they must go there and have tea. As s nearly an hour's ride to the terminus, they would neatly dispose e time before the evening train.

er the conductor had gone, Inigo had no further opportunity of g Susie what had happened. It was she who began talking now. noked his pipe, watched the delightful play of her features, and ed half dreamily to what she had to say. Now and again her voice ompletely drowned by the groaning of the tram as it mounted a It was all as odd and queerly moving as a dream: the mysterious ies of Hicklefield darkening below them; the little place, so cosily own, on the tram; Susie, with her eyes deepening into reverie, lost nembrance; the tale of her past that progressed as they progressed, m within a dream: it was all so strange. He has never forgotten it.

u're in for an awful time, Inigo," she began, smiling vaguely at "I'm going to tell you the story of my life. No, I'm not really, can't help thinking about everything in the past. It's all going ing away in my head. Meeting that woman, I suppose. I keep ng about my father. Did you hear her mention him? He was on ge, and so was mother. They were both in musical comedy. He baritone lead in touring companies, and she used to do soubrette French maids as a rule. She was half French and she'd an awfully accent. They used to play in those funny old jiggety-joggety , *The Country Girl* and *The Geisha* and *The Circus Girl*. They were both playing in *Florodora* when they got married, in Manch I can remember a dressing-case thing Dad always had with him a was a wedding present and had something on it, you know: "Wit Best Wishes of the Florodora Company, Manchester," and all th of it. It's silly but I just want to cry when I think of that. I don't why, exactly, but I can sort of see them there in Manchester and *Florodora* and "Tell me, Pretty Maiden" and everything—little figures, all very excited and happy, and when I think of them, these figures are all in a bright light, but they're ever so tiny and all r them is a huge blackness, and it's back there in nineteen hundred two and not one of them knows what's going to happen. Do yo Inigo? I'm sure you don't, and I simply can't begin to make you u stand how I see it. But it's just—sort of—life, the real thing, and you've got to laugh at it or cry a bit, when you see it like that, reall have. Now say I'm silly."

He shook his head, and the look he fastened upon her offere everything he had. But she was not thinking about him. She wa groping among her memories. When she began again, it was in a subdued voice, and he could only catch an occasional word here there. It was something about her mother, who had died only a or two after Susie was born. He gathered that she had been l after then by an aunt for several years. Then he heard more, fo tram was quiet and she was raising her voice a little.

"That's the queerest part and the one I remember best," she wa ing, "when father decided to take me round with him on tour. I about five or six when that began, and it went on for several It's all such a funny muddle, though bits of it are frightfully Going round dozens of towns, but they all seemed alike. Only s times the landladies called me 'poor little dearie' and sometimes wee lassie' and sometimes 'doy' and sometimes 'hinny'—I remember awfully well. And often when there was a matinée, Dad would me with him, and when he was on, I'd be held up in the wings an in the dressing-rooms, sitting on comedians' knees or in chorus laps, and I'd be given chocolates, and everything was always so and smelly—grease paint and powder and gas, you know—but I'd the band playing and people laughing and clapping, and I loved all 'as horrible sometimes at night, though, when I had to go to bed re Dad went down to the theatre, and sometimes the landladies were ible, with huge red faces and smelling of whisky. And the rooms I can see one now—it seemed enormous, with giant pieces of furni- and awful dark cupboards with Things in them waiting to spring on you—and the blinds weren't down properly and the horrible ıy light of the lamp outside in the street shone in, and I'd shiver and r there every night, creeping down under the clothes and just ng for something to come—bump! But then sometimes when father back, I'd wake up and go downstairs and he would be having his er and perhaps he'd give me some. He adored cow-heels, done in and with onions—and so do I. We had scores and scores of little we used to repeat over and over again. Dad said that bringing hese jokes was the only way he had of furnishing the home. He t drink much, not then anyhow, but I always knew when he'd had oo many because he always came and cried over me, and said I promise never to go near the stage, and always ended by giving 'hat he called elocution and ear-tests and telling me I had only to hard to get to the top one day because it was born in me. But ıs a darling, very handsome and with a jolly good voice, and all the ıdies adored him and so did most of the women in the companies ıs with; even I could see that. But then he decided it wasn't good ıe any more, and I had to live with another aunt near Clapham non and go to school—oh, hateful!"

the time he had learned how she fought against the dull horrors near Clapham Common, how she returned to her father when as fifteen, went into concert-party work with him when she was ı, saw him taken to hospital, to die there, when she was seven- how she had struggled on her own ever since, they were at the ıus. The town had long been left behind. There was nothing to n but a tiny shelter and the road that wandered into the gathering ess. But half a mile down that road, the conductor told them once was the grand hotel on the main road going north, the hotel ised by "motterists." Off they went, at a brisk pace. "Hope you mind stepping out, Susie," said Inigo, "but the fact is, I'm finding er cold now without a coat."

"I'll run all the way if you like," said Susie. Then she put a han
his sleeve. "Poor Inigo! I never thanked you properly, did I, for
ing the train just to keep me company?"

Inigo stopped and seized the hand that had just touched his sl
He was trembling a little. "Susie," he began, "I must tell you
I've made a tremendous discovery. I—I—adore you."

"But, Inigo," she cried, "how nice! I thought you did, though.
keep on, won't you?" She made a little movement that suggeste
was ready now to walk on again.

He had hold of both her hands now. "Yes, but it's much more se
than that. It's not just friendliness. It's everything, every mortal bl
thing and for ever and ever."

Her hands slipped away. "You sound as if you were about to
pose," she said lightly. "It's not as bad as that, is it?"

"Of course it is," he cried. "And I am proposing and anything
you like. I'm in love with you, absolutely, frantically. It's marve
It's terrible." The next minute he would have taken her in his
but she was not there to take. And then they were walking br
down the road again.

"I'm sorry," she said at last, and said it quite gravely.

"I don't quite see what you're sorry about."

"Well, you're rather a darling, aren't you?"

"I don't suppose I am," he replied rather gloomily. Then he br
ened up, and said eagerly: "But if you think that now, it will pro
be all right, won't it? I mean, I'm ready to give you a little time, th
it's frightfully hard—or will be frightfully hard—just sort of a
about you."

"Don't be absurd, Inigo."

"I'm not. That's how I feel. All the time you were talking in
tram, I was just dying to kiss you. I am now. I don't know why I
except that—well, this is the kind of love——"

"Well, what kind is it? Do go on, Inigo."

"I won't go on," he said gruffly. "I'll tell you some other time. Y
simply laughing at me."

"My dear, I'm not," she protested. "And to show you how seri
am, I'll tell you a secret. I've rehearsed this conversation heaps of ti

Vhat! With me?"

No, not with you, stupid, with nobody in particular, just a rather ne but frightfully attractive young man who was in love with me. he would say a lot of the things you've just said—though he usually t into detail far more—you know, said what it was about me that e him fall in love—and then I'd reply and say how sorry I was ——"

ust as you told me how sorry you were," Inigo put in, a trifle grimly.

nd then I'd tell him we'd always be the dearest friends but that nade up my mind I'd never never marry. I would tell him that I'm ded—as they say in the books of words—to my Art. And then very gently I would tell him to go away and fall in love with some one some one who could love him back, but usually he said he would othing of the kind, all other girls having lost their charm for him ver. I liked that part," she confessed, "and usually left it at that."

here's only one thing you've forgotten, Susie," said Inigo reproach- . "I'm a real person, not a vague, but attractive young man you've imagined. Doesn't that make any difference? It ought to, you v."

does. Now I'm really glad, really excited."

Vell, there you are then," he cried triumphantly.

nd I'm really really sorry. That's the difference, but that's the only rence. And now let's talk about something else. Shall we?"

here's nothing else in the world to talk about, absolutely," said gloomily.

here is. There's the hotel to talk about, and I can see it. It looks a big one, doesn't it, really 'motteristy'? Let's have an enormous It must be my tea because this is all my fault."

these two infants arrived at the hotel, which was evidently used as t by motorists going north and south on this main road. A number rs were standing before the entrance. Big as it was, the place looked and inviting.

igo looked at his watch in the lighted doorway. "We can just ige an hour here," he said, trying to sound as if the conversation the road had never taken place.

hen that's just right," said Susie, "and I think you're very clever to have planned it so nicely. But then you are clever, aren't you, Ini And I like you."

"I'm cold, hungry, and an ass," that young gentleman replied, made a desperate attempt to smooth his hair before a waiter ca sight of him.

III

Tea would be served, they were told, in the lounge. There was a l bright fire in the lounge, and there was also a large bright woman. stood out from the other guests, the assorted "motterists," like a c atoo among thrushes. Indeed, she was not unlike a cockatoo. A curved beak of a nose jutted out of her purply-red face; she had staring eyes and a little round mouth, daubed a fearsome vermilion; clothes were gaudy and expensive; every time she moved there w glitter of jewellery; and she seemed to have enough flashing odds ends of handbags and little boxes to stock a small shop. She sat a not far from their table, and was easily the most conspicuous perso object in the room. Susie and Inigo, however, had a further reaso remarking her gorgeous presence, for from the moment they ent she stared at them. At first she gave them a puzzled stare, but soon changed into a plain stare, which went on and on and did appear to mean anything.

"Why does she do it?" Inigo whispered. "There isn't anything w with us, is there?"

"That's what I've been wondering," Susie replied softly. "I've trying to go over myself and I seem all right. You looked a bit bl first, but now you're thawing out nicely." She handed him his "She must be wondering if she knows us."

"She doesn't know me—thank God!" he muttered.

"No, but she may have seen *me* somewhere," Susie went on wi flash of pride. "When you think of it, I've played to thousands thousands of people all over the country, and I must see somebody has seen me sometimes, mustn't I?" And then she became very very sparkling, and was so prettily attentive to Inigo that he beg think she must be in love with him a little, after all.

"Unless," he told himself, as he gloomily devoured a piece of s l, "she is doing it out of kindness, just to make up for not caring : me." By this time he could no longer bother his head about the an who stared. He did not even know if she was still there, for he gradually moved round his chair until at last he had his back to When he had finished his shortbread, however, he noticed that was looking up, with a rather puzzled expression on her face.

hat's the matter?" he enquired. "Is the starey bird going?"

ow I know I'm intruding," said a voice just above his head.

go jumped with surprise, and as he jumped he sent his fat armchair g back. It bumped heavily against something, and Inigo, turning l, discovered to his horror that the something was the flashing bosom staring woman. She gave the chair a push. He gave it a frantic The result was that the chair shot forward and hurled Inigo against a-table. One of his hands knocked over the hot-water jug, and the flattened itself against a plate.

n sure I *must* be intruding," cried the staring woman.

ot at all," said Susie, trying to smile sweetly at her and at the same keep one eye on the hot water, which was now creeping about ible. "Won't you sit down?"

ot at all! Rather! Absolutely!" roared Inigo, who did not know he was saying. He waved a hand towards a chair—it was the that had just been flattened against the plate and there was a piece ad-and-butter sticking to it. "Sit here—there—won't you?" he went He waved his hand again, and most of the bread-and-butter went e chair.

ought to introduce myself, oughtn't I?" the woman was saying.

o be careful of the hot water," Susie cried to her.

o, don't sit there," Inigo roared again. "It's all bread-and-butter."

ving said this, Inigo could say no more. He suddenly lost control nself. The woman herself, with her staring eyes and little beak nose and her magnificent finery, her unexpected arrival, his jump ubsequent antics with chairs and bread-and-butter, the watery ruin e tea-table—all these things made a combined assault upon him. next moment, everything in the lounge, everything in the whole , seemed wildly absurd. He flung himself down in his chair ave a yell of laughter.

"I'm Lady Partlit," their visitor announced, sitting down.

This was quite enough for Inigo, who went off into another f laughter. It would have been the same if she had been Mrs. Jon she had merely remarked that the weather was cold. He was hel now. Whatever happened, whatever was said, would be screami funny.

Susie gave Lady Partlit their names, but she only just managed t them out in time. Her eyes were very bright and she was biting lips. The next minute she too had fallen helplessly into the giggles

Lady Partlit smiled at them both a trifle vaguely. Her voice, how was triumphant. "I thought I knew you," she said. "You're in a co party called *The Good Companions,* aren't you? Of course you ar saw you at Sandybay a few weeks ago."

"Yes, we were there," Inigo spluttered. He looked hard at the t in the hope that he would somehow be able to control himself, b was hopeless. He pulled out his handkerchief, tried to wipe his and exploded again into silly laughter.

"I saw you three times," said Lady Partlit. "So good, I thought were. Such a change!"

"I'm glad!" Susie faltered, trying not to look at Inigo. "It's ni think——" But then she went off again. "Oh, do stop it, Inigo. *are* a fool." With an effort, she got her face straight, turned to Partlit and said apologetically: "You must think we're awfully rude it's just his silliness, and now—now—he's started me off." And giggled again.

"Not in the least," said Lady Partlit, still smiling. "And—er—w are you people going to now, if you don't mind my asking?"

"Middleford," replied Susie, and brought out the name as if it the greatest joke in the world.

"That's it. Ha-ha," roared Inigo. "Middleford. Ha-ha-ha-ha. S but I really have to laugh when I think of Middleford." And he b his head in his hands and yelled with laughter. This torrent swept any tiny reserve remaining with Susie, who promptly joined him. Partlit looked from one to the other of them; her eyes opened wider wider; her little round mouth gradually widened; her rather cheeks began quivering; then finally she burst into laughter too, a c ano sobbing that made the other two want to go on and on for ever. d there were the three of them, shaking, watery-eyed, helpless.

Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear!" cried Lady Partlit, dabbing at her eyes. don't know what it's all about, but I haven't laughed so much this g time. I like a good laugh too." Her speech was far homelier y than it had been before, and any suggestion of the great lady had npletely vanished. They saw before them a kindly, rather silly, rich man in her early forties, who waved away their apologies for their nishing behaviour.

I'm sure it's done me good," she told them. "I wasn't expecting to e such a good laugh in this place. My word! Now won't you let me er you some more tea? Are you sure? Well, what about some cock- s if the bar is open? Or some chocolates? Have a cigarette?" She duced a gold case, and the three of them lit cigarettes and settled vn to talk.

Don't forget our train, Inigo," said Susie. "You know how long it k us to get here, over an hour and a half."

What's this?" asked Lady Partlit, and when they told her, said ea- ly: "Now you mustn't think of going to the station that way. I've my here, and Lawley will take you down there in no time, and all nice d comfortable, and you'll be able to stay here all the longer. And t'll be nicer for me too. I was going through to Yorkshire tonight, d just stopped here for tea, and then I thought I wouldn't go any fur- r tonight because Lawley says there'll be fog farther up later on, and I said I'd stay here and go to bed early after dinner with a nice book. w what do you say to that? Let Lawley take you to the station."

Susie accepted at once, and though Inigo would rather have returned they came because he could then have had Susie to himself, he could t offer any objection.

You mustn't think it strange my coming up like this and talking to u," Lady Partlet continued, "because for one thing you must count me nong your admirers. I've never seen such a good show at the seaside fore, and I've told all sorts of people about you. Such an original me too! And then, another thing is, I'm almost in the business myself a way of speaking. My late husband—he was Sir Joseph Partlit—you y have heard of him—was very interested in the theatre business himself just as a side line, you know, and he left me a controlling inte in two West End theatres and some productions."

Susie's eyes lit up at once and flashed a message to Inigo. "He they said, "is the Fairy Queen."

"What's the matter?" asked Lady Partlit.

"Nothing at all," said Susie, "except that you're the person we dre about every night. Two West End theatres! Productions! Not mu cal comedy or revue, by any chance?"

"As a rule, yes. I'm glad too, because I like them best, though I l a good romantic play too."

"I can hardly believe you're real," cried Susie, smiling at her.

"But you mustn't think I've really anything to do with this busine Lady Partlit explained amiably. "I'm just a little nobody in the ba ground. All I do is sign things now and again, though I like to ke popping up and seeing what they're doing. Helps to keep me busy, y know, and a widow without children like me hasn't much to do. E don't run away with the idea that I've much say in it."

"You've enough say in it to take *my* breath away, Lady Partlit," s Susie sturdily. "Mr. Jollifant there—you can call him Inigo; he likes i may not care, because he's only an amateur slightly disguised, but for me——! And if Jerry Jerningham were here, I wouldn't be answ able for him. He'd probably want to kidnap you."

The effect of these last two remarks was astonishing. Lady Partl ruddy cheeks were now like two mounds of pickled beetroot; her e were soft and bright; her bosom heaved and flashed.

"You remember him, don't you?" asked Susie, who had observed th significant symptoms. "Our light comedian and dancer."

"Oh yes, I do. I thought he was—wonderful," Lady Partlit falter

"He is," said Susie. "Isn't he, Inigo?"

"Absolutely. Jerningham himself may be a terrible ——" But he he stopped because he received a kick on the shin from Susie.

"A terribly good dancer," that young lady prompted.

"Exactly!" cried Inigo. "I must say he's the best step dancer I' ever seen."

"And so marvellously good-looking of course," said Susie.

"Yes," said Lady Partlit faintly.

sie gave a little laugh that struck Inigo as being the most unreal ad ever heard. "It's funny," she said, "the way Jerry attracts all the en in the audience. They'd run after him if they could, but they . He's never to be found."

—is he married?" Lady Partlit brought out this question in a tiny d voice.

Vho on earth——" Inigo began, but was immediately kicked into ce again.

h no, he's not married," replied Susie brightly. "He's not even ing of it. He thinks about nothing but his work. He's very hard-ing and frightfully ambitious—like me."

ter this, the talk that followed seemed merely casual, but it had a of working round to Mr. Jerry Jerningham. Susie gave Lady it a list of all their future dates she could remember. When at last car came round for them, Lady Partlit slipped away and returned a large box of chocolates for Susie and a box of cigarettes for Inigo, was almost tearfully affectionate in her farewell, though her regret eir departure did not compel her, they noticed, to accompany them e station.

Vell," said Inigo, when they had seated themselves in the big limou- "I must say I don't understand that old girl. I think she's a bit ."

diot! Don't you see," Susie hissed, "she's the person who sent Jerry bouquet at Sandybay. She adores him."

Gosh!" was Inigo's comment. But he listened patiently while Susie ussed various aspects of this strange affair. They sat there in comfort, e the limousine rolled through the murk of Hicklefield. When it e to a stop at the station, Susie sighed luxuriously. "People can say t they like," she said wistfully, "but it must be marvellous to have t of money."

nd anybody who saw her getting out of that limousine must have ight she had a lot of money. Her sketch of a very rich and bored ng creature, the spoilt darling of fortune, was only offered to an ience of two porters, a taxi driver, and a nondescript, but neverthe- it was superbly done. Her hatless and overcoatless companion, who e out shivering slightly, was left somewhere in the air; he was there, but not in the picture; and it was not until he opened the door empty third-class carriage for her that he returned to the picture she was Susie Dean again.

IV

"Figure or no figure," said Susie, "I must have some." She was e ining the box of chocolates that Lady Partlit had given her. They very large aristocratic chocolates, and by the time they had eaten or three, the last glimmer of Hicklefield had left their flying win Once again Susie pointed out that it would be marvellous to have of money. She dwelt rather wistfully on the subject of riches.

England is pre-eminently the country in which it is difficult for to agree: if one turns realist, the other turns idealist; a cynic inst creates a sentimentalist. Inigo stoutly denied that money, beyond a essary competence, was important; he denounced the life of luxury, going to the length of refusing a third chocolate; and he declared Susie's attitude pained him. In a very short time, however, the l overcame the philosopher in him.

"If that's what you think," he said, rather gloomily, "I'll make of money. I don't want it, but I'll do it just for your sake. Didn't say I could probably make something out of songs?"

"Heaps and heaps," she told him. "If the right people hear th I'm sure your fortune's made, Inigo. I really mean that. You've a gift that could easily be a gold-mine."

"Well, there you are then. I'll make a lot of money for you."

"But I don't want your money, you absurd creature. I want to be myself, all by myself."

"I don't believe you know what you want," he declared, seeing th was obvious she did not want him.

"That only shows you don't know anything about me," she Then she thought a moment. "I want to be a star. I want to be S Dean—bang!—like that. Enter Susie Dean—bang! 'Here she is! want them to say. Not just for myself, either, but for my mother's and my father's sake—to make up for all their dreary journeys and and hard work and rotten pay and no chances. I know it won't mak

all that, yet I feel it will in a way if I go right to the top. Not that
lon't want it myself, of course," she added.

'Of course," he said.

'I believe you're being sarcastic."

'No, I'm not. Go on."

'Well," she said, looking at him but not seeing him, "I don't care
out having my photographs in papers and little paragraphs about me
d my name up in electric lights—not that it wouldn't be rather nice,
u know—but that's not what I think about. I'd like to have a nice
le flat—where managers rang me up and asked me to look at parts
nd a dresser who adored me and perhaps a very cosy car, small but
ghtfully posh; and enough money to spare to give all sorts of people
ightful surprises, holidays and presents; and now and then I'd like
run away from it all; go on a voyage perhaps under some other name,
d not let anybody know who I was, and then somebody would come
and say, 'You do remind me of Susie Dean,' and then I might admit
vas Susie Dean, and everybody on the boat would say, 'That's Susie
an,' and they'd probably get up an entertainment specially so that I
uld appear in it, and—oh—all kinds of things." She ended breathlessly.

'It sounds a lonely sort of life to me," said Inigo cheerlessly.

'Oh, but I'd have heaps and heaps of friends," she cried. "I couldn't
st without 'em. You'd be one, wouldn't you, Inigo?"

'I suppose so." He saw himself somewhere dodging in the back-
ound, holding her cloak, while all manner of important and handsome
les held her attention.

'You do sound miserable about it. I don't believe you want me to
successful. I believe you're one of those men who can only be friendly
they're allowed to patronise." She looked haughtily out of a window
ough which there was nothing to be seen. He tried to look out of
window on his side too, but found it impossible to avoid glancing
her. After a minute or two, however, he noticed she was peeping
him. He smiled, and instantly she jumped round and faced him.

"Aren't we absurd?" she smiled. "We're nearly as bad as Joe and
rs. Joe. Last summer they bought a ticket for the Calcutta Sweep,
d one day, just before the draw was announced, they began to talk
out their chances. Then when they'd awarded themselves a favourite,

they began to wonder what they would do with the money. Joe said
would buy an hotel at one of the big seaside places. Mrs. Joe said s
would invest all the money and live on the income from it. No ho
for her, she told him. He insisted on his hotel. They argued for ho
and got crosser and crosser and crosser until it ended in a quarrel a
they never spoke to one another for two days, the poor darlings. No
come and sit on this side and then you won't have to stare at me a
make me think I've done something dreadful to you."

Inigo rose and stood for a moment looking down on her and listeni
to the rhythmical rattle of the train. "It's melancholy, you know,"
said slowly. "I ought to be happy here alone with you, Susie. I beli
it's been my idea of happiness for some time."

"Why, Inigo?"

"I'm not going to tell you again. What I was going to say is that
rather melancholy. But then there's always been something melanch
to me about Sunday night, something a bit heart-breaking, absolutel

"I know," she replied softly. Then she looked fierce. "No, I don
she said in a loud voice. "Sit down here, Master Jollifant, Master In
Absolutely, and if you don't cheer up, I'll shake you. Unless, of cours
she added, peeping at him, "you're sad about me."

So they sat side-by-side and talked idly as the train went clanki
through mysterious regions of night towards the still distant Middlefo
As time went on, Susie said less and less, began to yawn, and droop
away from him, into her corner. She had just nodded off to sleep wh
a ticket collector came in and wakened her. Then she yawned a
drooped again, and this time her head sank in his direction until fina
it rested against his shoulder, where it remained, to his delight. Th
was perhaps a certain bitter flavour of irony in this delight, for she h
made it plain that he had little to hope from her and this was only t
surrender of sleep. But it had something trusting in it, and his hop
revived under the slight pressure of that head against his upper ar
The very cramp that soon invaded his limbs took on a romantic heau

Where it was the train stopped, shortly after ten, Inigo never kne
It seemed a fairly large station. Susie opened her eyes, sighed, th
went to sleep again, leaving Inigo praying that nobody would distu
them. At the very last moment, however, when the whistle sound

oor was flung open to admit some raw November night and a large
Inigo looked at the man in despair. The man looked at Inigo
cheerful interest. He sat in the middle of the opposite seat, re-
d his hat, mopped his brow, re-lit the stump of a cigar, put a fat
hand on each knee, and blew little benevolent clouds of smoke at
and the sleeping Susie. He was a well-developed specimen of a
of large man seen at all race meetings, boxing matches, football
hes, in all sporting clubs and music-hall bars. His head was pear-
d, beginning with an immense spread of jaw and ending at a
w and retreating forehead, decorated by two little loops of hair,
d in the middle. His eyes protruded; his nose shone; his little mous-
was ferociously waxed. There was a suggestion that innumerable
le whiskies were hard at work illuminating his vast interior. All
details Inigo noted with distaste.

e man removed the stump of cigar and winked slowly, ponderously,
igo. "Just caught it," he said companionably. "In the bar of the
e Horse at ten, and here I am. That's moving, y'know, that is."

go merely nodded but that seemed quite enough to establish a firm
dship with this genial intruder.

ere," he said, producing a flask as unexpectedly as a conjurer,
a drink of this. Go on, there's plenty for all. No? Well, will
wife have one? No, she's not your wife, is she? She's your sweet-
. Our wives and sweethearts," he proclaimed, holding up the flask,
may they never meet." He drank this toast with enthusiasm.

ind you," he said sternly, "that's just my fun, that about wives
weethearts never meeting. If I say that to the missis, she just laughs.
nows me well enough to know that that's my fun. My wife *is* my
heart, and we've been married twelve years at that. Twelve years
lways the best of pals—the best," he added fiercely, as if Inigo had
ontradicted him. "The very best," he went on, "the very very best.
's to her." And he took another pull at the flask.

nything she wants," he observed, "she can have—in reason. There's
n in ev'rything, isn't there? All right then. She's only gotta ask,
all. She knows it. Her mother knows it. 'You're lucky,' she says
y wife. 'You're lucky.' She wasn't lucky—that's my missis's mother
alking about now—and I say she wasn't lucky. She got nothing.

The old man wouldn't part. But that's not me. Get on the right of me, and there's nothing I've got you can't have. My missis kr that. She's on the right side of me. We're the best of pals, the very And the same with the wife's mother—just the same—the very Here's luck to the old lady." This toast apparently emptied the f which was now laid down on the seat, while its owner, after breat hard, looked at Inigo, looked at the unconscious Susie, and slowly sentimentally wagged his head.

At any other time, Inigo might have enjoyed this gentleman's soc but now he found it difficult even to tolerate him. Somehow that rai carriage was not the place it had been an hour before.

"Pretty!" said the stranger, still wagging his head at them. " pretty! As good as a picksher to me." He sighed hugely as he st at Susie. The last draught from the flask appeared to have wa away any lingering reserve, and now he was very tender and me indeed. "I know what it is. I've done my courting, holding he half the day and half the night, the same as you now. Happy tim you can't beat 'em. Look at her now, just dreamin' there, happy trustin'. And a nice little girl you've got hold of too, young feller, I see that. Look after her, and then you'll be one of the lucky like me."

"It's been a rotten cold day," said Inigo desperately.

"What's a cold day to a warm heart?" cried the other reproachf "Don't tell me you've noticed it's a cold day. I'll bet your little sw heart there doesn't know it's a cold day. Ah, I wish I was your young feller. Put your arm round her properly. Cuddle up to Don't mind me. I've been young. I'm young yet. I know what m the world go round. It isn't money. It's love. It's two hearts be as one, as the song says." He leaned back, tried to fix a goggling on Inigo, and sang softly, beating time with one hand: "My swe heart when a boy-yer—in days of long ago-er."

Inigo closed his eyes and pretended to go to sleep. It was al could do. The wretched song went droning on for some time gradually died away, to be succeeded finally by a snore. Inigo move cramped limbs cautiously, and let his thoughts go jog-jogging wit train through the night.

"Mid-ford! Mid-ford!"

Immediately the stranger opened his eyes, sprang up, grabbed flask, t, bag, and vanished.

"Are we there?" cried Susie. "I must have been asleep. Who was it?"

"That," said Inigo with deliberation, "was our fellow passenger, a large d rather tight gentleman with a mind like a cheap Christmas card. d most of the way he's been calling you my little sweetheart."

"Poor Inigo, how disgusting!" she said coolly. "Do look out and see you can see Jimmy or anybody there."

He crept out, very stiff and feeling rather cold. "I can see Jimmy ther up the platform," he announced at the door. Then he stood there king up at her. Their day was all over now. "Well, that's that," he d, a trifle mournfully. "Come along, Susie."

She looked at him curiously. "Help me down," she said. "I'm rather f." Then when she had got down and her hand still rested in his, cried softly: "Cheer up. And thank you for looking after me, go. There!" And it came and went so swiftly, that kiss, that he hardly ew if it had really existed.

"Susie!" he cried.

"There's Jimmy." And she hurried away, waving a hand.

We catch a last glimpse of him following her down the platform.

Chapter Six

THE BLACK WEEK

I

It began, that awful week, before they reached Tewborough. It beg —at least for eight of them—on the Sunday night at Middlefor The week at Middleford was a steady plodding affair, but it could bo one exciting event. This was the visit of a rich and eccentric old la Mrs. Hodney. She had driven in by car to the town to see her solicit on Wednesday, had stayed to see the show, and after it was over h insisted upon being introduced by the local manager, who knew her a "character," to Miss Trant, to Jimmy, to everybody. She was so d lighted with them all, she said, that she wanted them to do a queer o woman a favour. Would they all go out to her house, Custon Ha twenty miles away, on the edge of the moors, and give a performan on Sunday there for her, her maids, and any of the villagers who we not too stupid to enjoy themselves for once on a Sunday night in N vember? They must not think of it as a matter of business—though s was rich enough to pay for her whims, and if twenty pounds would com pensate them for their trouble, there it was—but they must think of it as matter of cheering up a lonely old woman who found it difficult to b pleased with anything and who would not be staying long in this worl Thus Mrs. Hodney, a very staccato but vehement old lady, who patt all the younger players on the back as she talked.

So it was arranged that all the actual performers should stay in Middl ford on Sunday night, catching a cross-country train on Monday mor ing to Tewborough, and give a special show (in evening dress) Custon Hall, which would have waiting for them, they were assured, very large drawing-room, a grand piano, and a good supper. "An mind you," said the local manager, "the old lady'll do you well. Sh a queer old stick—I've heard all sorts of tales about her—but she's tak ncy to you and she'll see that you're all right, I give you my word."

s visit was the great topic during the latter part of the week. Miss nt had waived any claim to part of the fee, so that it meant they ld receive two pounds ten shillings each, and there were many ting discussions, between Joe and Mrs. Joe, Elsie and Susie, as to what ht be done with this windfall. Then again the command perform- e—as it came to be called—was both a compliment and an adventure. s Trant and Mr. Oakroyd were pitied because they would not be e. Had they been going anywhere else, these two might have stayed too, but Tewborough was no ordinary date and there was much to done on the Monday. At Tewborough they were playing at the atre Royal, a real theatre, not a mere Pavilion or Assembly Room or thing of that kind. Miss Trant knew nothing about Tewborough , curiously enough, neither did any of the others, but she had seen an ertisement in *The Stage,* offering this theatre at a fairly moderate t, and for once she had acted on her own responsibility and had taken or a week, in spite of Jimmy's advice. "It's buying a pig in a poke," said darkly, but Miss Trant, who could be both venturesome and tinate on occasion, refused to be warned, and was encouraged by most he others, who were anxious to see themselves on the stage of a real tre again. Having thus committed herself to Tewborough, Miss nt considered it the great date of the year, their grand opportunity, l it was necessary that she and Mr. Oakroyd should travel by car sual on Sunday so that they could get to work at once on Monday. d they refused to be pitied because they were missing the command formance, for to them would fall the pleasure of first seeing Tewbor- gh and its Theatre Royal.

here had been some difficulty at first in finding anybody or any- ng to take them out to Custon Hall, which could not be reached by in. The garage proprietors of Middleford seemed curiously reluctant send one of their larger vehicles to Mrs. Hodney's remote village. At , however, a man was found. His name was Dickenson; he owned a , he said, that could seat twelve and had taken eighteen in its time; l he would drive them there and back for two pound. Under that, he d them, he would not budge; and they found they could not make him budge. Nevertheless, they were all relieved when they heard about Dickenson and his bus.

The rendezvous was Jimmy's lodgings, and by half-past six, the pointed time, all eight were there, in evening clothes and carrying inst ments and portfolios of music and an astonishing assortment of clo overcoats, shawls and scarves. They were all in high spirits. T was a break in the routine, an adventure. Mr. Morton Mitcham, look gigantic and very impressive in the Silver King and a long green sc said once again that it was quite like old times, and Mrs. Joe, struggl with her two woolly coats, an imitation Spanish shawl, and a very w opera cloak, once more agreed with him. All they wanted now Mr. Dickenson and his bus. After another five minutes, these arrived, and brought with them a flat-faced youth, one Arthur, w blew on his hands a good deal and appeared to have no roof to his mou

"You're a bit late," said Jimmy, quite pleasantly.

"Late!" cried Mr. Dickenson bitterly. "I'm early to what I thow was going to be. Bother I've 'ad with 'er, haven't I, Arthur?"

"Ee oo ah," replied Arthur, and then blew on his hands. Hav done that, he went on: "Ee oh oo ee oo ah."

"That is so," said Mr. Dickenson. "And now if we're going to st let's start. Though I'd as lief go back hoam and call it off, I would th

"Now what sort of night is it going to be, driver?" Mrs. Joe enqui graciously, in her best Duchess of Dorking style.

"It's going to be a mucky cold neet, missis," said Mr. Dickens "Tickle 'er up, Arthur. And get in, all on yer, and let's get off."

"These rugged North-country characters," Mrs. Joe was heard to m mur. "Rough perhaps but staunch as oak."

"I wish his bus was a bit less rugged," said Susie, looking inside.

It was certainly not a very luxurious vehicle. To begin with, it obviously very old, and when the engine started everything else star too, jumping and rattling in sympathy with it. The seats were v narrow and hard, and it had not a proper enclosed body but was mer roofed in with some sort of canvas. And though it may have held twe persons, the fact remains that when the eight of them, with their inst ments and music and wraps, were all inside, there was not an inch room to spare. Once they were on the road, the jolting was very unple but nobody grumbled much. It was all part of the adventure of the mand performance.

This to me," gasped Mrs. Joe in the darkness, "is Romance and a t change. A drive out into remote places, the show in a different set- g, against the background of one of our stately old mansions, an appre- ive audience, a pleasant repast to follow."

Not so much of the 'follow,'" said Elsie. "I vote we have the supper oon as we get there. I thought that was the idea, and I've had noth- but a cup of tea and a bun since half-past twelve, and I'm peckish y."

Now you settle that between you," said Jimmy Nunn. "You can't ect that to interest me. A drink of something, a piece o' dry toast, perhaps a bit o' chicken—breast—that's quite enough for me. I e say there'll be chicken."

Sure to be." This was the deep grave voice of Mr. Morton Mitcham. ey always do you well on these occasions—that's my experience, es and gentlemen. Everything of the best—champagne too, with k, though being a woman she may be a bit slack about the drinks. u ought to have seen some of the spreads the old colonial governors— Elkin Pondberry and one or two more—used to give us, after com- nd performances. Sumptuous is the only word—sumptuous!"

Well, I'm for splitting it like," said Joe, rather apologetically. "A o' supper before we start, and a good bite after we finish. One'll put rt into us before we begin."

And completely ruin your upper register," said his wife coldly. "I w what happens to you. You'll fill your stomach, and then you'll d in front of Mrs. Hodney, trying to sing, with your upper register rags."

I can't sing at all empty," he pleaded, "and you know you said your- at tea-time, 'Save your appetite for tonight.' So I say a bit before and n a good bite to come home on."

If Mrs. Hodney, obviously a lady, refined if a trifle eccentric, heard at this moment, she'd ask for your name to be crossed off the pro- mme," cried Mrs. Joe. "And I shouldn't blame her, Joe. I should say nce, husband or no husband and as good a baritone as you'll find in cert-party work, it serves him right and teaches him a lesson."

This mention of the programme immediately set them all talkin once. They wondered if they had really chosen the best numb Would Mrs. Hodney like this item and that? They were still talk about the programme when the bus suddenly came to a stop. As it impossible to see anything inside, Inigo looked out of the flap at the b

"Are we there?" somebody called out to him.

"We don't seem to be anywhere," he replied, and got out, to find h self in a cold and drizzling blackness.

"We're eight mile off," said Mr. Dickenson, who was now examin the engine. "Give 'er another turn, Arthur. It'll be teeming down i minute. That'll do, Arthur. Let 'er alone."

"Ee oh oo ah oh ee," said Arthur mournfully.

"Well, I'll 'ave to get ruddy mag. out, that's all," said Mr. Dickens who did not seem to be in a very good temper. "I thowt she was bitch 'erself up all along. 'Ere, 'old this. Now then, we'll try that. Give another turn, lad." The engine began spluttering noisily. "That'll It'll be pouring down in five minutes and 'ere to Custon's one o' the f est roads you ever set eyes on. I ought to 'ad more sense than to come this daft trip."

"Never mind, you chaps," said Jimmy, who had joined Inigo outs "We'll soon be there, and then you can put some beef and beer a and make yourselves cosy by a big fire."

"Ee oh oo ah oo," said Arthur, and blew on his hands very despo ently.

"This expedition would be gayer, I think, without Arthur," s Inigo, as he and Jimmy climbed in again. "There is something ab Arthur that depresses me—a sort of 'Quoth the Raven' sound about hi

The bus went very slowly now but rattled more fiercely than e Apparently the roads were narrow, winding, and steep, and it was c that Mr. Dickenson was not enjoying himself. The drizzle was stea turning itself into a downpour, and very soon the passengers too fou it difficult to enjoy themselves. Not only were they bumped about m unpleasantly but they also began to feel odd drops and trickles of r Evidently the canvas top was by no means watertight. They pulled th wraps and scarves about them, held on grimly to the backs of seats whatever else there was to hold on to, and assured one another that ould not be long before they were there. But never had any of them nown eight longer miles.

At last, however, they stopped, and Inigo, looking out again, reported at they had arrived at a large gateway leading to a drive.

"This is it," yelled Mr. Dickenson. "Custon 'All, this is. Shall I take right in if I can get in?"

"Oh yes," they cried happily, in chorus, he must take it up to the very oor if he could. Already they saw the triumphant arrival, the great ont door of the Hall wide open, the lights shining out, the stir of excite-ent among the crowd of retainers and villagers. As they went curving und the drive and everybody was trying to collect instruments and usic and wraps, it was instantly decided that they should have some-ing to eat and drink before beginning the show, for it was eight o'clock ow, half an hour later than the very last moment they had expected arrive at, and they all admitted they were hungry—all, that is, except mmy Nunn, who said he was dying of thirst. Out they tumbled, cold nd rather damp and a little battered, hollow inside perhaps, but still in ood spirits, delighted to be there, and ready to give old Mrs. Hodney e show of her life. They emerged into a downpour of that slashing ld rain of the moorland, but that did not matter when they were at e very door of the Hall.

That door, however, was closed, and there were no lights at all in the wer rooms, and nothing anywhere but a faint glimmer in one or two f the bedrooms. The house looked an inhospitable black mass.

"I thought you said they were expecting you," said Mr. Dickenson, iving a most unpleasant short laugh.

"So they are," said Jimmy uneasily, as he pulled at the bell handle.

"This part of the mansion," Mrs. Joe observed hopefully, "is little sed, no doubt. Everybody is busy with various preparations at the back. ome under the porch, my dears, until the door is opened."

Jimmy tugged away at the bell and at last a flicker of light was seen elow. The door was opened a few inches, then another few inches. What d'you want?" asked a voice.

"Come along, please," cried Jimmy impatiently. "We're the concert arty, *The Good Companions,* come to give the show."

The door was opened wide now but only in order that an elderly and

weary-looking manservant could stare at them in amazement. "W
is it you want?"

Jimmy explained again.

"Well, you've come to the wrong place," the man told him.

"Nay, they've not," cried Mr. Dickenson, "this is Mrs. Hodney's, I
know."

"Of course it is," said the man.

But when Jimmy explained at greater length, the man still stared
amazement. "Well, it's no use you're coming here tonight, or a
other night as far as I can see. Mrs. Hodney's poorly, right bad. S
had a stroke o' Thursday and she's in a bad way. Doctor's here n
and he's sent for a nurse. That's how it is."

"Well, I'll be——" Jimmy gasped.

"Just hold on a minute," said the man. He let the door swing to, a
they heard him walking away.

Then the voice of Arthur prophesying woe was heard above all othe
"Ee ee ah oo oo oh, oo ee eh oo."

"By gow! Arthur," cried Mr. Dickenson bitterly, "you're right an' al

"If Arthur makes another sound," said Susie in a low tense whisp
"I shall scream and scream. I can't bear it."

Now the door was flung wide open and they found a pocket elec
torch shining on them. "I don't understand this," said a very testy vo
from behind the torch, "and I don't want to understand it. I haven't t
time to spare. Mrs. Hodney's very ill indeed, very ill. I doubt if sh
recover but we're doing our best. Now kindly go away and make
little noise as you can. Good night to you." The torch vanished; t
door was swiftly but quietly closed, locked, bolted.

"Good night to *you,*" cried Jimmy softly. "With love and many hap
returns of the day. Creep away, boys and girls. It's all off."

"My God!" This was from Elsie, and for once she spoke for them a

"Do yer meantersay——" Mr. Dickenson began, but was cut short b
Jimmy.

"I meantersay," said Jimmy, "that we're going back to Middleford
sharp as we can, and the sooner you get that bus started the bette

"Beef and beer!" cried Mr. Dickenson, in a very ecstasy of savage iron sy by a big fire! Gorrr! You're mugs yerselves and you've made into one."

Ee oh oo oo ur oo oo," said Arthur indignantly.

his last remark enraged Mr. Jerningham, of all people. "Oh, you shet ," he screamed.

Ho, ho! And what's Arthur want to shut up for, eh?" Mr. Dicken- sounded very menacing. "Nar, for two blurry pins——!"

Kindly start your car, driver," said a forlorn and dripping object, astonishing dignity. "And don't talk about pins in that way when es are present." And having delivered this reproof, Mrs. Joe climbed the bus, removed her sodden opera cloak, sneezed twice, and burst tears.

adies!" Mr. Dickenson sneered. "Gorrr!" He was then tapped n the shoulder. After that he was taken to one side.

ow you see me, don't you," said Joe, speaking very softly. "I'm a t sort of chap, I am. But I'm feeling sorry for that old lady in there. l I'm very disappointed because there's no show. I'm also very gry and I'm wet. And that's my wife who's just spoken to you. v, another word, just one more word, from you, and I shall have the t pleasure of relieving my feelings by knocking your silly ugly head t off." And as he spoke, Joe came nearer and nearer, a most formida- figure even in the darkness. "Just say some more, that's all," he d, almost persuasively.

e ready to give 'er a turn, Arthur," said Mr. Dickenson despondently, he sought his seat in front.

he return journey was horrible. It seemed to go on and on for hours hours. Three times the bus had to stop, twice for engine trouble, once because Mr. Dickenson had missed the way. On the other l, the rain never stopped at all, and the canvas cover merely acted as stributor. There had not appeared to be any room to spare on the up, but now everybody was in everybody else's way, and everybody very wet and cold and hungry and so snapped at everybody else, everybody else, being also very wet and cold and hungry, promptly ped back again. Mr. Morton Mitcham, attempting a reminiscence similar experience, was told at once that nobody was interested. n Mr. Jerningham complained that he was wet through, he was informed that a drop of water would do *him* good. Elsie annou that this time she really was through with the rotten Stage. Mrs. pointed out, between sobs, that she had always been one to take Bad with the Good, but that having ordered a complete outfit for l George, boots and all, on the strength of this extra engagement, she now at the End of her Tether. Susie told Inigo how depressed she at the thought of Mrs. Hodney, the queer little old woman who had b so lively the other night and was now dying perhaps in that lo dismal house; but when, in sympathy, he put his hand on hers, pushed it away, said it was like a fish, so cold and wet, and asked not to be a fool. Jimmy Nunn groaned from time to time, but o uttered three words during all the journey. *"The Good Companio* he cried, with a ghastly chuckle, and after that nobody spoke for q a long time.

Middleford was going to bed when they finally arrived there. T considered desperately, miserably, their chances of obtaining food drink and hot baths at that late hour on Sunday. They heard alr the outraged tones of landladies preparing to retire. Shivering, their clothes so much sodden pulp, they crawled out of the bus, and it see the last straw when Jimmy plaintively announced that he would hav collect five shillings each from them to pay for it. While they w fumbling for their money, however, Inigo, who had disappeared f moment, came back and said quietly: "It's all right. I've paid him. can settle up some other time. Let's get away."

It was a miserable party that met next morning to catch the el o'clock train to Tewborough. They stared at one another's pale f and reddened noses; they listened to one another sniffing and sneez they talked gloomily of aspirin and quinine; they yawned and shiv and groaned. Mrs. Joe and Elsie had colds in the head; Susie said felt feverish; Jerry Jerningham was watery about the eyes; Inigo's v was rather hoarse; Joe moved stiffly and talked of "rheumatics"; an for Morton Mitcham and Jimmy, both of whom looked queer eno at any time, they were now a sad spectacle indeed, Mitcham being n ing but a gaunt yellow ruin, and Jimmy, who really looked ill, a stric gargoyle. It was just their luck, they told one another, that they sh be in such a state when Tewborough and its Theatre Royal were aw them. They admitted, however, that a packed and enthusiastic use on the first night might pull them through. "Ill as I ab," said Mrs. , between sniffs, "I cad respod to the publig. That's my tebremend. wborough's a big dade and we'll blay ub to id." This was the only ic that could rouse them out of their staring and shivering apathy.

t was tea-time when they arrived there, and too dark to see anything the town as the train crawled into it. Miss Trant and Mr. Oakroyd e there on the platform. Inigo seized hold of Mr. Oakroyd at once. u've got to save our lives," he said. "We had a hell of a time last ht." Briefly he described the great fiasco. "You were lucky to be of it, I can tell you," he concluded. "Now then, what about Tewbor-h? How are you getting on? What's it like?"

r. Oakroyd drew him to one side. "I've nobbut been i' t'place a day, ou knaw," he said cautiously. "But you've got to talk of a place as find it."

Well," said Inigo impatiently, "and how do you find it?"

Here," said Mr. Oakroyd, bending forward and curving a hand round mouth. "It's bloody awful."

aving delivered this verdict, he looked solemnly at Inigo, shook his d, then stumped away to find the baggage, with the air of a man would continue to do his duty whatever it cost.

II

edral cities, market towns, ports forgotten by the sea, spas long of fashion, all these can decay beautifully, and often their charm eases as the life ebbs out of them. Industrial towns, like steam nes, are only even tolerable if they are in working order and puffing y. Tewborough was like an engine with a burst boiler lying on the of a road; it was a money-making machine that had almost stopped king, for only a wheel here and there shakily revolved or a pulley a groan or two; it was a factory that could now show you nothing broken windows and litter and mouldering ledgers and a mumbling aker; it was nothing but an old cash-box containing only dust and webs and a few forgotten pence. Trade in Tewborough had nearly peared altogether, and it was quite obvious that it would never come again, would always prefer other and pleasanter places. It was a town of dwindling incomes, terrifying overdrafts, of shopkeepers w lived by stretching one another's credit, of workingmen who were r idly becoming nothing but waiting men, their chief occupation bei to hang about the doors of buildings that were known—with a fine iro —as Labour Exchanges. Tewborough had always been one of the ugli towns in the Midlands, and now it was easily the most depressed a depressing. Its wealth had long ceased to accumulate but its men s decayed. The days when Tewborough's coal and lace-curtains and t tacks were in brisk demand everywhere, when many a local man w still liked his tea in a pint pot could "buy up" the county's Lord Lieut ant and was known to have shaken Gladstone himself by the hand, th days had gone and had left nothing behind them but a few pub buildings in a bad Gothic style, two bewhiskered and blackened statu some slag heaps, disused factories and sidings, a rotting canal, a la slum area, a generous supply of dirt, rickets, bow legs, and bad teet and the Theatre Royal.

When Mr. Oakroyd brought out his verdict on the place, he and M Trant had not spent a whole day there, but their roseate visions h long faded and vanished. It was impossible to like the town, thou they had both tried hard and had perhaps succeeded in concealin little of their dislike for it from one another. Miss Trant told her she had never imagined that any town could be so hideous and depr ing: she wanted to run away at once and never even think of it ag Sitting in the dingy coffee-room of the hotel, with a plate of congeal mutton fat in front of her, she had felt she was ready to cry at moment. She knew already that Tewborough could not be amused their show or any other show. When the man at the hotel had he she had taken the Theatre Royal, he had stared at her and then gi a short and disconcerting laugh. "Having a pop at it, are you?" he said. "Well, I suppose there's nothing like trying. You're not the f and I dare say you won't be the last, even yet. I thought old Droke looking pleased with himself, last time I saw him. Met him yet? H a queer old stick, if you like, as rum as they make 'em round here— rummer. Well, well, well!" And Miss Trant did not like the soun this at all.

Early on Monday morning she made the acquaintance of Mr. Dr

though she did not spend much time in his company, it left her in
loubt that Mr. Droke certainly was as rum as they made them. He
a very little old man, with an immense head and quite tiny legs and
so that he looked like a dirty and dingy gnome. His senile voice
whistling through his browny-white moustache and beard, and he
a horrible trick of coming quite close and punctuating his jerky
ments with vigorous upward nudges of his elbow. "It's a good
re," he would say. "Isn't better round here, go where you like."
ge. "Been some famous actors there, they tell me. I don't know 'cos
sn't here then, I wasn't." Nudge. "Had a shop in Liverpool then.
it and came back here. Got a shop here now." Another nudge.
Trant in retreat and Mr. Droke in close pursuit, ready for the next
e. "Belonged to my brother, this theatre did, and he left it to me.
n't bother with it much, too busy, and don't care about theatres.
used to be always wanting me to be doing this and doing that to
t I couldn't be bothered, d'you see, and having my shop too and
being so bad. Nothing wrong with it, though, nothing at all."
ge. "A good theatre still. All fads, that's all. Nothing wrong with
ou're not faddy, are you?" More nudges. "Well then, it'll suit you
ght. Very cheap at the price, very cheap. Too many faddy people
aren't there? Don't know what they want."

ss Trant was not sure that she knew what she wanted but as soon
e saw the outside of the building, she knew at once that she
nly did not want the Tewborough Theatre Royal. Her heart sank.
sition was bad, for it was down a dark side-street; and its appear-
was worse. Missing panes of glass, unpainted and rotting wood-
, dirt and litter, everywhere. The only things that were bright and
there were their own playbills, and they looked pathetic, so young
hopeful, so utterly out of place. The inside was worse than the
le. It was smaller than most old-fashioned theatres, but it was
on the usual plan, with stalls, pit, dress circle, and separate gallery.
seats in the gallery were narrow wooden benches, and those in the
ere similar benches with backs to them, and both pit and gallery
abominably. The stalls and dress circle had the usual plush chairs,
ey were all old and worn and stained. At one time the place may
made a pretty show of gilt, but now the dust and grime were so

thick on the gilding that it returned no answering gleam to the li
On the ceiling and the proscenium were some cracked nymphs and
ing cupids. Such carpets as there were on the corridors were thread
Old playbills lined the greasy walls: *Are You a Mason?; The Girl f*
Kay's; the Tewborough and District Amateur Operatic Compan
Dorothy; The Face at the Window; Dr. Faustein in his *Great*
meric, Thought-Reading and Mystical Oriental Entertainment; and
and there were yellowing photographs of heroic actors in togas or
wigs, bewhiskered old "heavies," and simpering leading ladies of
'Nineties, all of them catching her eye as she passed and whispe
"We're dead and gone." She peered through a dirty glass door lab
Sal on B r and saw a counter and a few bottles all thick with dus

"That's shut up now," said Mr. Finnegan. "We 'ad the licence t
away. 'Ard on a management, very 'ard!" This Mr. Finnegan, to w
she had been handed over by Mr. Droke, was called the manager
he was obviously a general factotum in receipt of a mere pittance.
was old, shabby, and gently steeped in liquor, and such a pitiful f
that at any other time Miss Trant would have felt sorry for him, but
as he shuffled down these grimy corridors with her, she could only r
him with distaste. When they returned to the auditorium, its atmos
seemed more unpleasant and oppressive than ever: it was like wa
into a drawer full of old rubbish that had not been turned out for t
years. Miss Trant shuddered.

"Oh, but it—it's awful!" she cried. "All so dirty and depressing.

"Well," Mr. Finnegan mumbled, "I don't say it wouldn't do w
clean-up, but—bless yer—it's a prince to some. You're new to it,
yer? Thought so; tell it in a minute. Wants tidying a bit, I dar
but wouldn't be worth it just now. And theatres is all alike whe
come in during the day and they're all empty, all alike they ar
you off if you don't know 'em. I've seen this place packed to t
—everybody here—mayor and corporation, everybody! When
Barrett opened 'ere with his *Sign o' the Cross,* there was over a nu
pounds in the youse, over a nundred pounds, Monday night, an
was when a quid *was* a quid, when you could buy something w
Can't do that now, course. There isn't the money in the town."
shook his head mournfully.

The faded crimson curtain began shaking too. It gave a creak, then lly parted and rose. Two figures in shirt sleeves walked on to the ge, and Miss Trant, approaching, discovered that one of them was . Oakroyd. When she drew near, she saw that he was very gloomy disgusted.

Eh, Miss Trant," he cried, "it is a mucky noil at t'back here. You ver saw such a muddle. We'll have some trade on getting this t, we shall an' all. Come and have a look at it."

iss Trant went round, looked at the stage, peeped in a dressing-n or two, sent for Mr. Finnegan (who could not be found), tele-ned to Mr. Droke (who did not reply), and went in search of two women to assist Mr. Oakroyd and his shirt-sleeved colleague, who a glassy stare and a perpetually open mouth.

He's not all there, isn't Charlie," whispered Mr. Oakroyd. "That's ame—Charlie. He's a bit soft but he'll ha' to do. If he were right, ouldn't be working here. If this is a the-ater, give me them pavilions kursaals ivvery time. This is nowt but a rag-bag. It'll cap me, Miss t, if we do much here. Town's got a bit of a miserable look t it."

has," replied Miss Trant emphatically. "And I never saw a mis-er."

o more did I," said Mr. Oakroyd. "We've nobbut been here a two- hours, you might say, and it might improve a bit on acquaintance, o far it's a right poor do."

. Oakroyd, as we know, was not difficult to please. No man can live uddersford for over forty years and be hypercritical; your Brudders-an is never one of those sensitive creatures who are entirely at the y of their surroundings. But already Tewborough had been too even for Mr. Oakroyd. Before meeting the others at the station, turned to his lodgings, thus making further acquaintance with the and disliking it more. His terse comment to Inigo summed up his of the whole situation, the theatre, the town, the lodgings, every-. After making that comment, he walked away, partly because d to see to the baggage but also because he had a good sense of the atic. After a few minutes he returned to Inigo's side.

u and me has to share rooms," he announced.

"Oh, how's that?" Inigo asked. "Is the town full?"

"Nay, there's nowt on here at all. But they won't let. We'd a ri job getting lodgings and they've all got to share. It's allus alike. L brass fowk's makking, less they want to mak'. If you go to a pl where they're as throng as they can be, they're allus ready to mak bit more. You come to a place like this here, where all town's on t' and they're all pining, and you can't get 'em to let you have a room two and sell you a bite and a sup o' summat. Fowk's so badly off, t won't be bothered."

"Reluctant as I am, Master Oakroyd, to break in upon this deep ph sophical strain," said Inigo, "I must put a question. What are the like?"

"Well, you'll see for yersen in a minute," replied Mr. Oakr "There's plenty o' room, I will say that. We've getten a big bedro with a gurt double bed in and one o' these little uns, camp beds. number nine, Billing Street, and it's right handy for t'the-ater. Bu gow!—I don't know whether I'm not feeling up to t'mark or wh but there's summat about this place that seems to tak' t'heart right o' me. I hope you don't mind being in wi' me, lad," he added shyly.

"Of course I don't," said Inigo, who didn't.

" 'Cos I'll be right glad of a bit o' company i' yond place," he cluded.

There was certainly something very cheerless about Billing St It was narrow and dark, and had far more than its share of listless a women and children with grey faces and reddened eyes. It had or three little warehouses with broken windows; a greengrocer's seemed to have nothing but potatoes and paper bananas for sale; a and-fish shop that smelt of tallow; a tiny grocer's that apparently cialised in black lead and sardines; a furtive little newsagent's, fu announcements about special wires and tips from the course; an u taker's, with a specimen brass plate and a blackening wreath in the dow; a herbalist's establishment, adorned with a large placard that *Your Stomach Wants Watching,* a number of mysterious green pa and a highly coloured drawing that had some reference to ski eases; a second-hand shop filled with bamboo tables, flat-irons, and of oilcloth; and two of the dingiest and dreariest looking little ses that Mr. Oakroyd, a man of experience, ever remembered entering. Just behind the street was a building with a fantastic tower, nister conglomeration of pipes and ladders and tanks, and this, it eared, was a sulphuric-acid works. Nobody seemed to know whether as still making acid or not, but if its pipes and vats were idle, their l was not, for it descended into the street in sudden and sickening s.

umber 9 was the largest house in the street, and it looked the gloom- You could only imagine it existing in a perpetual series of dark embers. No sooner had Inigo set foot in it than he thanked God he was not there alone. No wonder Mr. Oakroyd had talked t "a bit o' company." The bedroom was quite large enough for of them and it seemed reasonably clean, but there was something gely chill and depressing about it.

igo sniffed. "What is this queer smell? I've met it before. Wait nute. I know. It's just like the smell of old magazines. When I a kid, I used to dig out ancient copies of the *English Illustrated zine* from the lumber-room, and they had a smell just like this. very odd!" He looked about him. "Not very jovial, is it? I feel there were a body in the next room."

here is," replied Mr. Oakroyd grimly.

hat!" Inigo jumped.

ell, it's as good as one," Mr. Oakroyd went on. "T'landlady's mother's i' there, ower eighty and bedridden. You'll hear her ing. I only hope she'll last t'week out. They've all gotten summat g with 'em here. It's war ner an infirmary. Mrs. Mord—that's lady—her you've just seen—she's not ower-strong——"

bit blue about the face, certainly," said Inigo gloomily. "I don't that I want to hear any more."

u might as well nar we've started. Her husband's been off his a long time—he wor a clurk in one o' them warehouses—and I know fairly what's he's got, but I've nivver seen a feller so swelled l purple he is and puffed up, it taks him five minutes to do owt for n and he can hardly talk. Eh, he's in a bad way. You'll be seeing oon."

won't."

"And you haven't to excite him—that's what t'landlady says—he h to be excited——"

"I don't want to excite him. I don't want to set eyes on him. sorry for him, very sorry for him—he sounds like a human fung Hello!—what's that?"

"That's only t'owd lady coughing."

Inigo breathed hard and looked thoughtfully at the things he unpacking.

"Ay, they're a rum lot here," Mr. Oakroyd continued. "Ther sort o' young woman. I haven't had a proper look at her, and Mord says nowt about her, and I don't know who she is."

"For the love of Mike," cried Inigo, "don't tell me there's some wrong with her too! It'll finish me, absolutely."

"Well, all I knaw is she doesn't seem to do owt and there's sur funny about her. When you're going up and down t'steps or t'passage, you suddenly see her face peeping out from nowhere and she lets out a sort o' laugh and next minute you hear her scamp away as if somebody wor after her. I've seen her three times nar I'm getting a bit used to it——"

Inigo had stopped unpacking. He was now sitting down and s at his companion. "She sounds as mad as a hatter," he said despair

"Ay, I fancy she must be a bit soft. They seem to run to it There's a feller at the-ater called Charlie and he's not quite all No harm in him, y'r know; just hasn't got twenty shilling to t'poun

Inigo stood up. "I'm going," he announced.

"Nay, lad, stick it, stick it! It's best we can get. And I only g here 'cos I said they'd be two of us."

"There must be an hotel. I shall go to an hotel. You can come

"Nay, I'm going to no hotel. I've takken these lodgings an staying here. They've gone to a lot o' bother to get it right f It's all nowt. Stick it, nar you're here."

"All right," Inigo replied gloomily. "I shall spend most of my at the theatre. That's the only thing to do. No wonder you s was bloody awful. The adjective was justified, absolutely."

"Eh, I wasn't talking about this place," said Mr. Oakroyd.

igo looked at him with horror. "What were you talking about ?"

Vell, t'general carry on. Town itself, to begin wi', and t'the-ater."

'heatre?" Inigo's voice almost rose to a scream. "Don't tell me 's anything wrong with that!"

it Mr. Oakroyd insisted upon telling him what was wrong with theatre, and they were halfway through tea before he had done. s Tewborough do's a washaht," he concluded, "and you can mak' our mind about that. We shall do nowt here."

'his is where we look sick," Inigo groaned. "I told you about last t, didn't I? And everybody's half dead today. All the way we've saying that only a good week here will pull us together. Tew- ugh or death has been our motto, absolutely. Lord help us!"

ertainly looked, Mr. Oakroyd admitted, as he took out his pipe and et of *Old Salt,* as if they were in for it.

III

about a frost!" cried Mrs. Joe, immediately after the performance onday night.

ou could skate on it for weeks," said Susie gloomily. "And I'll I've a temperature of 102."

nd I'm sure you look it, my dear," Mrs. Joe told her. Then she on, passionately: "Was there an audience at all tonight? Was *anybody* in the house? I thought I heard a sound once from where, but was I mistaken? Does Tewborough know we're here?" ked wildly.

knows but it doesn't care," said Susie.

aid to Joe last night: 'Mark my words, Joe, this is going to be a eek. I feel it in my bones,' I said. Tomorrow, I shall spend most day in bed—and what a bed, my dear!—I'm sure it's one of those hat rise in the middle, like a camel. And the room has no out- and no cosiness. Not over-clean and the walls all covered with graphs of Oddfellows. But I shall spend most of tomorrow in it, g myself, and then I shall come down again tomorrow night, but no better the next day I shall *not* be here, I shall go sick. The ing that can be said of me is that I disappoint my public, but what I have to ask myself now, my dear, is this: Have I got a publi Tewborough?—and—Is it worth it?" Mrs. Joe produced these q tions with an air of triumph.

"No, it isn't worth it," said Elsie crossly, "and I wish you'd shut What's the good of talking?"

"Jimmy looked really bad tonight, I thought," Susie said reflecti

"I expect we all looked bad." Elsie sniffed hard. "I know I rotten enough, and feeling rotten isn't a hobby of mine like it i Jimmy's. Me for some aspirin tonight. Come on, Susie, you *are* s Let's get out of this thing they call a theatre. Theatre Royal—my Theatre Dustbin—if you ask me. Oh, ca-ar-m on!"

On Tuesday night there were exactly fifty-three people in the ence. It was miserable when they kept silent, and it was worse w they applauded, for then you seemed to hear the empty spaces moc the thin faint clap-clap-clap. Not that they applauded often. All heart had gone out of *The Good Companions.* They trailed thr the performance, and the only time they showed any signs of livel was when their growing irritation got the upper hand. Elsie compla bitterly of Jerry Jerningham; Susie openly accused Inigo of murd her accompaniments; and even the good-humoured Joe began g bling. Several of them declared it was high time Mr. Oakroyd learned his business, and were instantly told by that indignant man to go and mind their own, which was, he asserted, "in poor fe Jimmy Nunn was strangely listless, and it was queer and disconce to see him so quiet, so yellow and shaky. Miss Trant, who felt apologetic about her disastrous venture, though it was she and no others who would suffer most from the certain dead loss on the tried to smooth out these prickly relations and to cheer everybod but the heart had gone out of her too. The dismal town and the able waif of a theatre kept her spirits for ever sinking, for to leav was only to encounter the other.

Wednesday brought a fog, not one of the choking yellow Lo horrors, but still a good thick blanketing fog, which settled on the early in the morning and stayed there all day. *The Good Compa* sat huddled in their several rooms, trying to make the most of tiny and horsechair armchairs or sofas, reading papers that seemed t e another planet, under greeny-white tattered gas-mantles, dozing shivering and occasionally getting up to peer out of the streaming dows at the grey woolly nothingness outside. Of all of them, per- s Inigo was the most cheerful, simply because the aspiring author im now rose to the occasion. That author, who worked more fit- than ever in these days, had not yet finished *The Last Knapsack,* ng set it aside on the plea that wintry weather brought about an ropitious atmosphere, but nevertheless he now made his appearance n.

ff with the motley and on with the inkstand—that's what I say," o told Mr. Oakroyd, in their common sitting-room. "I was in the dle of a song, but I can't think about songs now. The mood, the d—Master Oakroyd—is dead against any pierrotry. I was intended e a man of letters and not a mountebank, and today I begin an —very bitter—that I shall call *England's Pleasant Land.* It will deal the town of Tewborough, with a few other such resorts thrown nd will be devilish ironical, bitter, absolutely. It will relieve my ngs, and it'll also make some of 'em sit up."

hat's the idear," said Mr. Oakroyd, puffing comfortably at his pipe beaming across the hearth at his companion. "If you can't do it Tewborough, you'll nivver do it with owt. But who's these that's g to be made to sit up?"

ell—er—the—er—people responsible for such a state of things," ed Inigo, vaguely but severely.

nivver knaw who they are," Mr. Oakroyd confessed. "Other fowk knaws, though. It's allus either capitalists or t'workingmen, or this Parlyment or t'last, or it's landowners and employers or it's hies. I can nivver mak' nowt out on it mysen, can't tell whose fault but then I'm not one o' t'clever sort. It's allus all a right muddle e. But you'll mak' summat owt on it, I dare say. And while re at it, just slip in a nasty piece about yon' Droke who owns -ater. Put us i' t'cart and right, he has. I call him a mucky mean man, who owt to be going round wi' a little rag-and-bone barrer, wt. But get thysen going, lad. Get it aht o' thy system."

igo nodded gravely, lit a pipe, then without hesitation and with e flourish wrote at top of his first sheet: *England's Pleasant Land:*

by I. Jollifant. Nor did he stop there. He actually began the es
itself. "It is eleven o'clock," he wrote. Having stared at this fo
minute or two, he crossed it out and put in its place: "I have just loo
through the window, which is gemmed with moisture." This did
please him, so out it came, and he began a new sheet, at which
frowned for nearly ten minutes. Then he wrote: "Outside, this m
ing, the spoil of many clanking years——"; crossed out "clanki
crossed everything out; then drew six faces and absent-mindedly d
rated them with curly moustaches; then sighed, filled and lit his
again, and leaned back in his chair.

From the hall outside came the sound of a very slow dragging f
step. Mr. Oakroyd looked up from his newspaper. "That'll be
Mord," he announced, "and he's coming in here—if he can no
manage it." Mr. Oakroyd said this with a certain relish, as if he ra
liked breaking bad news.

Inigo groaned. We have already heard Mr. Oakroyd describe t
landlady's husband, and since then Inigo has had two encounters
the purple and swollen invalid. "I'm sorry for him, my heart bl
absolutely," Inigo muttered quickly, "but I can't stand having him ab
It's like watching a ghastly slow-motion film. Have I time to get o

He had not time to get out. There was a vague knock at the
Then the door opened slowly, very slowly, a maddening inch or tw
a time, and finally admitted the stricken Mr. Mord, who looked pu
and puffier than ever. He stood just inside the room for at le
minute, and then, having partly recovered from the journey, he
duced, with all the care of a man saying something for the first
in a foreign language, the words: "Good morning, gen-el-men." T
he nodded, very slowly. Then he smiled, and his smile was so leis
that there was time to remark the appearance and disappearanc
every crease in his dark swollen face. Then he made a step forw
then another step forward, then another. He saw a chair, seeme
examine it very thoroughly, and finally moved towards it. "I'll ta
a seat—if—it's all—the same—to you—gen-el-men," he said; and
he spoke it seemed as if every syllable was an achievement. The
lowered himself into the chair, carefully placed a puffy hand on
knee, turned his head round slowly to look first at one and then a

, and ended by attempting speech once more. "Seems—to me—a y—morning," was his verdict. "Used—to get—lot o' fog—here—ime."

ather, yes! Awful lot of fog! Nasty thing, fog! Never liked it lf." Inigo found himself jerking out these idiotic phrases at what ed an incredible speed. "Must excuse me now, Mr. Mord. Awfully . Have to rush off." And off he rushed, at least until he found himutside the room, when he stopped and wondered where to go and to do. The bedroom was miserably cold and cheerless, and he d have to sit in his overcoat there and probably have to listen to the voman coughing in the next bedroom. If he wandered about the e, at any moment he might meet that mysterious and terrifying le who peeped round corners, gave a sudden screech, and then went pering away. On the other hand, he could not possibly stay in the g-room and watch Mr. Mord's horrible slow-motion performance. vent to the front door and looked outside. It was chill and ghostly. rept upstairs to his bedroom, snuggled under his overcoat on the and read a stained old copy of *Tom Bourke of Ours.*

was chill and ghostly too in the theatre that night. They played danced and sang like people in a miserable dream. Nobody was letely laid up yet, but nobody was any better. There were more blings and complaints, and it looked as if there would soon be right feuds between the various bickering and snarling members e troupe.

Thursday the fog turned into black rain. This was the day on h most of the shops closed in Tewborough and the surrounding cts, and there were hopes of a better audience for that night. Mr. oyd, who had been round to the theatre for half-an-hour, returned e middle of the afternoon to smoke a pipe with Inigo by the fire, old him there were a few scattered bookings.

op fowk here's got a bit more to spend than t'other fowk, so en we'll ha' summat like a nordience tonight," he remarked. "But isn't one thing, it'll be t'other."

nd what do you mean by that, my sage Bruddersfordian?" asked lazily.

ther wi' t'troupe," replied Mr. Oakroyd with great promptness.

"Bound to be a bit of bust-up soon, mark my word. All at it. some on 'em'll get rough edge o' *my* tongue afore so long an' all, they're going on. And there's owd Jimmy there, looking fit to d right poorly. And another thing. When I were going on, I saw Morton Mitcham coming out of a pub and I could see he'd had a Well, just afore I leaves the-ater in he comes wi' that chap, Finneg both on 'em a bit goggly—and they've getten a bottle o' whisky wi' 'e full un. They'll be at it nar, pair on 'em. Just you keep yer eye on Mitcham tonight. If he isn't three sheets i' t'wind by tonight, call a liar, lad."

Inigo could not keep an eye on Mr. Mitcham before the perform began because Mr. Mitcham was nowhere to be seen. When the tain went up, he was still missing. There were more people in theatre that night than there had been on all the other three nights together; the place was about half full, a good many people having c in from neighbouring small towns and villages, and it had a li air; with the result that the players themselves felt more cheerful. only exception was Jimmy Nunn, who was more listless and shaky ever. At the end of the third item, a song by Joe, and while the ence was still clapping, Mr. Mitcham made his entrance. His mak was very sketchy and he appeared to have a rather glassy stare. He fairly steady but nevertheless contrived to knock a chair over befo sat down himself. For quite ten minutes, during which his assis was not required, he sat, a huge huddled figure, staring at his b At the end of that time, when Jimmy Nunn was about to announc next item, Mr. Mitcham suddenly sat up and began playing. Ji who had no idea what was wrong, stared at him, but there wa help for it. So Mr. Mitcham went on playing, very loudly and a speed, and the rest of them had to pretend that it was part of the gramme. Ten minutes, quarter of an hour, twenty minutes passed, still Mr. Mitcham went twanging away, until at last the audience, admiring and half bored, burst into applause. Then he stopped, gered forward, bowed, and suddenly roared out: "La'ies Shenelm one thing wanner say—one thing—thas all—jus' one." And then, ing a deep breath, he bellowed: "Four times roun' the worl'"; bowed again. At this the audience applauded again, while the erformers, now stiff with horror, tried to look as if nothing out of the dinary was happening.

Smiling idiotically, Mr. Mitcham now held up a long shaky hand, nd said: "Prosheeding ennertainmen'—permission, la'ies an' shenelmen few fea's leshermain. Will any la'y—any shenelman—*Any* la'y—*Any* enelman—any-any-anybody—" he stopped for a moment—"take-a-rd?" And he held out his banjo.

Inigo, catching an agonised glance from Jimmy, immediately started aying as loud as he could, and Joe was able to hustle Mr. Mitcham off e stage in such a way that the incident appeared to be a well-rehearsed ng. Once in the wings, Joe took care that it should not be repeated, urrying the protesting Mitcham down to the dressing-room, while the hers went on with the performance.

Miss Trant always confessed that she went in terror of drunken men, ut there was no sign of it that night. She was so angry that she sisted upon seeing Mr. Mitcham as soon as she could. Even when he se or wobbled to his feet, towered above her, and brought out again at large idiotic smile, she found she was not at all frightened but only anted to shake some sense and decency into the great silly old disusting baby.

"Goo' eening, Miss Tran'," he said genially. "Goo' housh to-ni' and I orrem goin', didden I now?"

"Please go home at once, Mr. Mitcham," she cried. "You ought to be hamed of yourself."

He looked pained, and for a moment or two regarded her in silence ith reproachful goggly eyes. "Mish Tran', these not wordsh of a ien'," and he wagged his head mournfully. "No, no, no. Who orrem goin'? Didden I? Four time roun' the worl'—four times, indjew—*Four*—an' still gerring 'em goin'—Morton Mitcham."

She turned away in disgust and looked appealingly at Joe, who had not turned to the stage. "Come on, ol' man," said Joe. "Just you get ourself going."

Mr. Mitcham seemed to regard this as a brilliant though bitter partee. "Clever, clever," he said, shaking his head, "bur nor wordsh of frien'. Bur if I'm nor wanned, I'll—go." And he suddenly went reelng away. Joe took charge of him, telling Miss Trant that he would be back at the theatre before the second half of the show began. For moment now, Miss Trant felt inclined to go too, to turn her back o the wretched theatre and let herself cool down in her room at the hote She made up her mind that Mitcham should leave the troupe as soon a possible. She was still furious. To behave like that, just when thing were so bad for her, was downright disloyalty, and the thought of i angered and then saddened her.

This was not the worst the evening had to offer, however, for in th middle of the second half of the show, Jimmy Nunn suddenly collapse He had sung one of his two songs—or at least had struggled through i somehow—and had made his first bow and then retired to the wing to make some slight change in his costume; Inigo was already playin the opening bars of the second song; when Jimmy, instead of changin stared vacantly for a minute, gave a curious little moan, and would hav fallen full length if Mr. Oakroyd, who was standing by, had not caugh him in time. Under his comic make-up (as a postman) his face wa deathly pale; his lips were blue; and there were horrible little convulsive movements in all his limbs. Mr. Oakroyd knew that poor Jimm always carried a small flask of brandy about with him, and this wa discovered in the dressing-room. Miss Trant, trembling, managed t force some of the brandy between the blue lips, while Mr. Oakroy supported the head and shoulders. There was some confusion on th stage, but all the time Inigo was still playing the same idiotic *pom-po poppa-pom, pom-pom poppa-pom* for that second song which no might never be sung again. The audience was growing restive; the was some stamping of feet at the back.

Jimmy stirred; some colour returned to his cheeks; and he opene his eyes. He was able to sip a little more brandy.

"We must get a doctor," said Miss Trant.

Jimmy shook his head. "No. No doctor," he muttered. "All righ in a minute. Carry on show."

It was Mr. Jerry Jerningham, of all people, who took command o the situation now. He darted into the wings, exchanged a word wit Miss Trant, then, pale but fairly composed, returned to the stage, stoppe Inigo, and said: "Ladies and Gentlemen, Ai regret to announce the Mr. Jaymy Nenn will nat—ar—be able to continue his pawt of the—e rogramme—awing to—ar—sudden indisposition." Here he stopped for noment, and there was a noise somewhere in the auditorium. It med as if somebody was trying to get out in a hurry. "The next n—ar—will be a bahlad by Miss Stella Cavendish." At which the lience clapped, as audiences always do; Mrs. Joe walked over to piano, looking very dignified but in such a flutter that she spilled f her music; Mr. Jerningham, that intrepid exquisite, gravely took eat; and the performance continued.

hey got Jimmy to his dressing-room and he was still muttering t he did not want to see a doctor when there came the sound of ces from the corridor outside. "Well, I don't knaw, missis," Miss ınt heard Mr. Oakroyd saying. The next moment, a thin middle-d woman in black had stalked into the dressing-room and, ignoring ss Trant and Joe, was bending over Jimmy, who was staring at with his mouth wide open.

And how are you now, James?" she said, still examining him ely.

ecovering now from his first shock of surprise, he gave the ghost a grin. "Not so bad, Carrie. What—you doing here?"

You look badly, James. I thought you did earlier on. It won't James. You're a sick man. You're not fit to be sitting here, with t silly paint on your face. You want looking after."

iss Trant, who had been too astonished to speak at first and then l not known what to say, now made a slight movement.

I dare say you're wondering what I'm doing here," said the de-nined woman, looking at Miss Trant with an unfriendly eye. "Well, Mrs. Nunn. And as soon as they gave out he wasn't well, I came nd to see him. And it's lucky I happened to be here. I knew were coming here because two of your troupe I saw the other Sun- at Hicklefield Station told me you were coming. You saw me of the window that day, James," she added grimly.

Yes, I did," said Jimmy, and left it at that.

Yes, yes, of course, I see," said Miss Trant hastily. She felt very barrassed. "We've been trying to persuade Mr. Nunn to see a doctor. now he hasn't been well all the week."

And never likely to be," cried Mrs. Nunn scornfully. "Nothing proper to eat, wet clothes, and dirty lodgings, I know! He ought be in bed now. Tewborough Theatre Royal! Well, he's going to h what I've got to say now. He's heard it before but this time perh he'll believe me."

This left Miss Trant no alternative but to go and leave this strang united pair alone. Joe had already stolen out, so now Miss Tr followed his example. About quarter of an hour later, in the wi she found herself confronted by Mrs. Nunn again, and it was q obvious that that determined woman had decided what was to be d The very look of her reminded Miss Trant of a coiled steel sprin

"James Nunn is coming with me," she announced at once. "H in a poor way and I'm going to look after him. You must man as best you can without him——"

"Well, but naturally, I don't want him to go on playing here wh he's so ill," Miss Trant protested. This extraordinary woman seem to imagine they were ready to drag poor Jimmy on to the stage necessary. "But where—I'm sorry, but I don't quite understand—wh is he going?"

"With me," replied Mrs. Nunn promptly and firmly. "I live ab twelve miles away, between here and Hicklefield. I've got a sh That's why I came today, half-day closing. James Nunn's gone way and I've gone mine, but we're husband and wife, nothing al that, and I'm not going to stand by and do nothing when he's such a state. I told him where it would land him before he'd d but he wouldn't have it. Now he's beginning to learn." She loo as if she were about to turn away, but brought out another rem as if it were a postscript. "Your troupe's not got enough go in not half enough go; you want to keep them up to the mark bet Miss." And, with that, she stalked away.

Miss Trant, gasping a little, stared after her, and wondered w she ought to do. Finally, she stayed where she was for another minutes or so, then went down to Jimmy's dressing-room again. Jim would want to see her before he went, and after all she had a ri to know what was going to happen to him. But the dressing-ro was empty. It was incredible that they could have gone like th without another word, but there it was; they could not be fou

my's astonishing wife had spirited him away, just as if she were
itch. "I shall believe in a minute she *was* a witch," she told her-
miserably, as she drifted back down the dingy smelly corridor.
head ached and she felt ready to cry at any moment. Oh, this
tched, wretched Tewborough! She stayed to see the end of the
ormance, which had dwindled into a mere dismal sketch of their
al show, and to tell the others what had happened. Too tired and
irited to join in their wild surmising and speculating, she crawled
ier hotel, lay awake and listened to the black rain still falling on
vborough, and felt alone in an ugly and incomprehensible world.

he next morning, as she sat scribbling letters over the coffee-room
a visitor was announced. It was Mr. Morton Mitcham. He looked
ent and bilious; longer than ever but more ruinous; and he seemed
ome creaking into the room, an unmelodious jangle of bones. He
e forward, one hand clutching his sad sombrero and the other
ously fingering the immense buttons of his overcoat, the Silver
g. Miss Trant remembered this name for his overcoat—she had
otten all about it, and it returned unbidden—and then she told
elf that she could not possibly send him away. And in any case,
n Jimmy absent, it would not be wise, she reflected.

Miss Trant," Mr. Mitcham began very solemnly, in his deep harsh
wl, "I am here to make what apology I can—for last night. I under-
d that I nearly let down the show—at a difficult time, too—and I
eve I also offended you personally." His eyes stared hollowly at
above his sunken and yellow cheeks. "I'm sorry. I'm very sorry
eed. I throw myself upon your mercy, believe me."

All right, Mr. Mitcham," she said hastily. "I'm sure it won't hap-
again ——"

It will *not* happen again."

Very well, then"—and she felt like this gigantic creature's school-
tress; it was absurd—"we won't say anything more about it."

Miss Trant, this is generous of you. It's—it's wonderful." Then,
ier surprisingly, he stopped, lowered his massive eyebrows, and
ed at her with something like disapproval. "But it won't do,"
went on, with an air of mournful reproach. "Something *must* be
about it. I ought to be ashamed of myself and I *am* ashamed

of myself; but I doubt if I'm sufficiently ashamed of myself. Tell here and now, Miss Trant, how disappointed and disgusted you For me, Morton Mitcham, the oldest and most experienced mem of the party, the man who ought to see you through, the one trou you ought to be able to depend on,—to behave like that! Gah! makes me sick to think of it. And Jimmy ill too! The show right against it! And what am I doing? Rub it in, Miss Trant, rub it Ask me how I'd like you to tell people that Morton Mitcham let down. You can't say too much or put it too strong," he went just as if she really had said all these things. "I deserve it, every w of it."

She could not help smiling. "If you insist, of course, I will say t I think you behaved very badly—or at least very stupidly, and th was really angry about it last night. In fact, I had made up mind——"

He held up a hand. "Pardon me for interrupting," he said ea estly, "but there's just one thing I've got to tell you. It couldn't h happened anywhere but in this place. Tewborough, Miss Trant, been my what's-its-name—my Waterloo. Yes, it's downed me. I d know whether I'm getting too old for the road or what—but here, Tewborough this week, I've touched rock bottom."

"So have I," said Miss Trant, not without bitterness.

"I'm an old traveller, a bit of a vagabond, if you like," he went with a certain mournful gusto, "but I'm an artist too. The te perament's there, all the time, a lion waiting to pounce. I must h *something*—a bit of adventure, a bit of good cheer, a hand from audience, a new show going well, anything will do, I don't ask fo lot. But in Tewborough—so far as I'm concerned—there's been *no ing*. The place, the people, the rooms, the theatre, the show frozen every night—believe me, Miss Trant, I'm an old trouper, four tin round the world, but I've nerves and all this has just got on 'em. put it to you frankly—I'd just got to light the place up somehow, a yesterday I overdid the illuminations. And that's how it is."

"I understand," she assured him. And she did. She could alm find it in her heart to envy him his toping. "It's all been a mistak

" she said wearily, "and I think we're all having a bad time ıffering from nerves. It's not like the same concert party. But ust help me out now, especially since poor Jimmy's been rushed newhere—I don't know where—by his wife. We're in an awful e now."

ss Trant," he said very impressively, "you have here a man who's to see you through, whatever happens. Whatever you're doing, g up a new programme, anything, you can count on Morton ım. I'll give half the show, if you like; it won't be the first time one it. Only say the word, whatever it is, and I'm there."

ank you," she cried, still amused but also rather touched.

ank *you.*" And then he added gravely: "I should like to shake on that, Miss Trant, if you don't mind."

hey shook hands, and then Mr. Mitcham immediately became erful and reminiscent self again and insisted upon telling her all various places he had visited that were not unlike Tewborough, ı it was hard for anybody but Mr. Mitcham to see any resem-. Then he departed, after assuring her again that she had in Iorton Mitcham, the man who would see her through, the man vas prepared, if necessary, to keep the show going by himself. that very night he was compelled to keep his promise in part, dreadful thing happened. Jimmy was absent; but then they had ed that. But Jerry Jerningham was missing too. At first they ıed he was merely late, and after waiting a few minutes they without him, a sadly depleted troupe playing to a sadly depleted ce. No message had been received from him at the theatre, and Miss Trant sent Mr. Oakroyd round to his rooms to see what ppened. Meanwhile, the others carried on as best they could. osence of both Jimmy and Jerningham made a terrible hole in ogramme. Susie and Mr. Mitcham, however, contrived to fill up pply some comic relief, gagging desperately. When Mr. Oakroyd ed, he had a story to tell that only heightened the mystery. an at his lodgings doesn't knaw where he is," said Mr. Oakroyd. ıid nowt to her. But a car come this morning, she says, and he off in it. He didn't tak' onny luggage—she took notice o' that, you can bet yer life, 'cos she'd want paying afore she'd let him owt away—and he didn't let on where he was off to or say owt to her. But it wouldn't cap me," he concluded, "if he hadn't ta'e hook bart luggage, just gi'n us the go-by."

"I don't know what that means," said Miss Trant rather peev "so I can't say whether I agree with you or not."

Mr. Oakroyd shot a curious glance at her. This was not like Trant. "I mean," he said shortly, "he's gone off, luggage or no gage. I can't say it plainer ner that." It must be confessed th their tempers were a trifle frayed by this time.

Miss Trant walked away without another word. It did not m where Jerningham had gone, the fact remained that he was not w he ought to have been, that he had let them down. She was hurt, a When the interval came, she found that Elsie and Susie were no l on speaking terms and that Mrs. Joe had a complaint to make the conduct of Mr. Morton Mitcham, who seemed to imagine, Joe observed, that the programme belonged to him. Miss Trant re to listen to any of them. "Don't be babyish," she snapped, to astonishment, and turned her back on them. She had had as as she could possibly stand, she told herself; the whole week a fiasco, money thrown away; Jimmy ill, missing; Jerningham mis the rest of them getting drunk or wrangling, not making the slig attempt to help her out; no loyalty, no comradeship; the whole in ruins. She felt she was sick of it all. Here she was, stuck in awful place, trudging through black streets, her time spent in a dingy hotel or a dirty broken-down theatre, and this misery costing her more than the most expensive holiday she could devis herself. She could not hang about and watch the performance tr to an end; she wanted to go to bed, to read something distant, and adventurous, to forget Tewborough and its horrible Theatre and *The Good Companions*—the very name made her wince; first, there was something to be done.

That was why, when the show was over, Mr. Oakroyd said to all: "Miss Trant's gone home, but you've to look at notice-boar t'door." On the notice-board was a sheet of paper that summ n all, in the name of E. Trant, to attend a meeting on the stage following day, Saturday, at noon: *Urgent.*

IV

noon on Saturday they were all there, not excluding Mr. Oakroyd, ose pipe was still in his mouth but quite cold and empty and whose e cap was as far back on his head as it could possibly go, two facts t proved beyond doubt that he was uneasy in mind. They were uneasy, subdued; and when they spoke their voices were quieter n usual. It was a morning as cold and grey as slate. Every few onds one of them either coughed or yawned, and they all looked d. Inigo, glancing every now and then at Susie, wondered if she was ill, for all her sparkle was gone and she was pale and heavy-d. Nothing had been heard of either Jimmy or Jerry Jerningham, l they all had the air of being survivors after a shipwreck.

I think you'll agree," Miss Trant began, with a curious return to earlier half-nervous, half-detached manner and clipped speech, "that 've got to decide what's to be done. To begin with—about tonight. it worth while giving a performance at all?"

No, it isn't," said Elsie. "Last night was ghastly. They'll be throw- things tonight."

Preposterous!" This was from Mr. Morton Mitcham, who drew nself up to his full height and menaced Elsie with his eyebrows. 'hy shouldn't we give a show? There are six of us, aren't there? I l it turning good money away not to give a show. Why, one of —just one of us—is too good for Tewborough, let alone six of us. e known the time when a whole drama and vaudeville show thrown were done with less than six. I myself—allow me to say ——"

'Oh yes, we know!" Elsie put in rudely. "Out there in Timbuctoo, y back in Eighty-three, you worked miracles. We know all about at."

'You know nothing," said Mr. Mitcham with great scorn. "You ven't had a chance to learn. You've been nowhere. You've seen thing. Ignorance, that's your trouble, young lady, sheer ignorance."

'Oh, you go and ——" Elsie exploded.

"Now that won't do, my dear," Mrs. Joe cried hastily. "Do not let us forget ourselves, please. We're having our Trials and Troubles know—or if I don't, then who does, my word!—but don't let's desce to Name-calling and—and—Baydinarge and Rudenesses." And M Joe sat up erect, looked very dignified indeed for about two secon but then unfortunately was compelled to sneeze.

"Well, I say—give tonight a miss," said Elsie sullenly.

"And I say you're rotten mean," Susie blazed out, "to think of Here's Miss Trant dropped an awful lot on the week and you do even want to give her a chance to get something back. After all, i Saturday and there's sure to be some sort of a house tonight. Wha the sense of turning the money away, as Mr. Mitcham says. We c give them a jolly sight better show even now than they can apprecia if I know Tewborough."

"Half a minute, though, Susie," said Joe in his slow honest fashio "It's Miss Trant who's asking us if it's worth it, so I don't see y can fairly blame Elsie for saying it isn't. It seems to me it's for Mi Trant herself to decide. I'm sure we'll all do our best, but if s thinks this is going to give us a bad name, and it might, then she better call it off."

"What do you think?" asked Miss Trant, turning to Inigo, to who she felt closer, in this present mood, than she did to any of the othe for, like her, he was a newcomer to this world.

Inigo shrugged his shoulders. "It's all the same to me. If it w a matter of leaving this graveyard of a town, I'd say, let's go at onc for I believe it's simply this place that's done us in, absolutely. B if we've got to stay here, we might as well give the show tonigh It's practice for us; it might brighten somebody's evening here; an though I'll bet all the money we take tonight won't go very far, it help you, Miss Trant, to bring down the loss a bit. On the other han if you say, Let's pack up and go, on to the next place, over the hil and far away, I'm your man, absolutely."

There was a murmur of assent, but Miss Trant sprang to her fee walked a yard or two, then faced them all. "But now I come to th next thing," she cried. "Are we going to other places? Is it wort while going on at all? That's what I'm asking myself."

She stopped and there was a little chorus of exclamations, throug ch the voice of Mrs. Joe could be heard repeating, in tragic tones:

knew it. I knew it."

Please don't misunderstand me," Miss Trant went on. "It's not ney I'm thinking about, though I've lost a good deal, as you must ise, especially this week. And you mustn't imagine for a moment rich, because I'm not. It was only because some money came un- ectedly that I was able to do this at all. But it isn't that, though urally it's rather dreadful continually losing money. It's something ——" She hesitated.

May I say something, Miss Trant?" said Elsie, rather sulkily. "If this week that's bowled you over, I hope you'll remember that you ught us here, that it was your idea taking this stinking brute of a atre."

You *are* the limit," cried Susie, looking as if she was ready to silence for ever. "Won't you be quiet!"

Why should I be?" demanded Elsie.

Grrr!" There was exasperation, indignation, disgust, and we know what beside in this fierce noise that Susie made. But now she ned to Miss Trant: "You're not really going to chuck it, are you, ss Trant? I know we've done badly so far, but really we haven't d a chance yet."

'Not a dog's," said Joe gloomily.

'I realise that just as well as you do," Miss Trant told them. "It's t that at all. It's—it's—what has happened this week that makes feel I've had enough of it. Oh, I know this place has been awful d I brought you here. I never ought to have rented this dreadful, ominable theatre—I know that—I made a mistake, and I'm paying arly for it. But you might have stood by me——"

"Stood by you, Miss Trant!" cried Mrs. Joe, throwing up her hands d glancing round with a look of deep despair. "Never was any anager of mine so stood by as you've been by me this week. If had been Drury Lane I couldn't have done more, and wouldn't have ne so much. Night after night, I've come here rising from a Sick- d. 'No,' I said to Joe, when he begged me to stay in and look after yself, 'my Duty's there. If it was anybody but Miss Trant, I wouldn't it,' I told him. Weren't those my very words, Joe?"

"That's right," said Joe, staring very hard at nothing in particu

"I've no doubt whatever you did your best, Mrs. Brundit," M Trant went on, a trifle wearily. "But I can't get away from the feel that the party as a whole has let me down this week. This was special venture—I admit it's turned out to be a very silly one—and y ought to have backed me up. Instead of that, the party has gone pieces ——"

"You can't blame us because Jimmy had a heart attack or whate it was," Elsie interrupted. "And as for some people ——" She stop and looked significantly at Mr. Mitcham, who for his part tried very successfully to pretend she wasn't there.

"Yes, yes, that was our bad luck," cried Miss Trant impatien "That couldn't be helped, but other things could—quarrelling, bothering about the show, not trying to make the best of it, leav the rest of us in the lurch—oh, you must know what I mean! If y don't, it doesn't matter; I'm only trying to explain myself. I feel whole thing's gone to pieces."

"I'll never, never forgive Jerry Jerningham as long as I live going off like that," Susie exclaimed.

"That boy's yellow," said Mr. Mitcham, and he said it in such a w as to hint that he had known this all along and was rather surpri that the others had not noticed it too.

"I suppose he *has* gone," Susie said doubtfully.

"Yes, he must have gone," Miss Trant replied, with a kind of we contempt in her voice. "He's left his things behind, but probably preferred to go without them rather than stay here. You called ag this morning, didn't you?" she asked Mr. Oakroyd, who was dism sucking his empty pipe in the background.

"Ay, I went and left t'message to say we was having a bit of a me ing here, if he came back. T'landlady said she'd heard nowt, an fancy by t'look on her she'd just been takking stock o' his booits a shirts and collars to see how much they'd fetch in case she heard more on him."

"We've seen the last of that bright boy," said Elsie. "He'd a lot say about Mildenhall, when he went and did the dirty on us, but h better himself, as he'll hear from me if ever I set eyes on him n."

Well there you are," Miss Trant told them. "The first real test— —look what's happened. Can you blame me if I feel we can't go It's not been easy for me to do what I have done—I don't mean ut money, but simply that I knew nothing about the Stage and 't understand this life—I had to take what seemed to me an awful of plunge. And what attracted me, I think, more than anything irst was the way you were all so loyal and kept so cheerful and ndly under the most horrible conditions. And now—well—I'm id I don't see it like that any more."

fter her voice had trailed away into silence, nobody spoke, nobody ed, for what seemed quite a long time. It was so quiet that they ld hear, coming from the forgotten world into that strange shrouded e, the sound of the factory buzzers in the town.

hen Susie stood up. "No, I suppose I can't blame you, Miss Trant," said tonelessly. "But—oh, I'm sorry. You don't know how sorry m." There were tears in her voice now, and she swung round walked to the side of the stage, where Mr. Oakroyd was standing.

Nay, lass," he said, "tak' it easy, tak' it easy." Then he rubbed chin hard, tried to push his cap further back still, finally pushed ff his head altogether, picked it up and jammed it on again, then ped forward and manfully spoke up. "Nar then," he began, "I 't suppose onny on yer want to hear what I've got to say, but as ody seems to be saying owt just nar, happen you'll listen a minute. d I say, Stick it. Don't give up, Miss Trant. Have another do it. Nar don't get into your head I'm saying this 'cos I don't want lose mi job—I don't want to lose it, I'll tell you straight, specially as I knaw t'ropes—but it isn't that. I fair hate thought o' a thing ning to nowt afore it's got started. Nivver let it be said that this e Tewborough took all t'heart out on us. Tewborough be damned, ay. We can show it."

That's the stuff, Master Oakroyd," cried Inigo enthusiastically. "I'm h you there, absolutely."

'It's nobbut a matter o' turning a corner," said Mr. Oakroyd earnly addressing himself to Miss Trant. "It's allus same wi' iverything.

Stick it, get round t'corner, and you're there. Gi' this up nar it's all flummoxed, might as well nivver ha' started. Nobbut go o bit, and you nivver knaw, happen in a fortnit or fower week yo coining brass and they can't mak' enough on you. Nay," he c reproachfully, "we're on t'road, aren't we? Ther's downs as wel ups. This here's a down all right. What of it? We'll get on t'r agen, chance it, and—mark my words—if we're not up, right at o't'tree, a'most afore you can say Jack Robi'son, nay, I'll eat this c And Mr. Oakroyd, carried away by his own eloquence, plucked off cap, held it out, jammed it on his head once more, and turned a

"Darling!" cried Susie tearfully as he passed her.

He replied by giving her a wink, not a jolly impudent wink a stammering embarrassed wink, which announced that he knew q well that he had been making a fool of himself. It would take a n years to live down such an emotional outburst in Bruddersford.

There was hardly time for the others to say anything before voice of Mr. Oakroyd, this time raised in expostulation, was heard ag coming from that part of the theatre to which he had retired. Ev body looked up and waited expectantly. Something was about happen, their attitudes said, and they were glad of it.

A large, glittering, jangling woman charged into the centre of group on the stage, and looked about her wildly.

"Lady Partlit!" cried Susie and Inigo together, at once recognis their acquaintance of the hotel outside Hicklefield.

"Yes, yes. How d'you do? Of course!" Lady Partlit babbled, t ing to see every one at once, so that she seemed to be spinning lik top. "I'm sorry to come like this. Must be intruding. But they t me—here. *Is* he here? Oh, where is he?" And she beat her li fat hands together.

Miss Trant was staring, amazed. "I don't understand," she beg blankly. "Who—what—is it——?"

Susie darted forward. "Is it," she gasped, "Jerry Jerningham?"

Lady Partlit was at once so excited, anxious, confused, that she look exactly like an agitated parrot. "Yes, of course, Mr. Jerningham. been all *all* a mistake, I assure you, and of course I can explain eve ng to him when I see him. Are you sure, are you really sure, he's here? Because," she concluded wildly, "he's gone."

They assured her that Mr. Jerningham was not there, and would ve asked her all manner of questions—for they were all bursting h curiosity—but she did not give them time. "Miss Trant, are u?" she went on, rushing across to jangle in front of that astonished man. "So disturbing for you, of course, and so nice of you not to nd about my coming like this." Then she rushed back to Susie, om she apparently regarded as the one member of the party likely be sympathetic. "A complete misunderstanding from beginning to d, I do assure you, Miss Bean, Miss Dean, and all meant in the endliest way. But he simply went off, went off without a single rd, and I was sure I should find him here. And of course you're thinking it's so strange of me, coming and behaving like this, ruding too, but I had to come if there was *any* chance at all of plaining to him, you see. And of course it's worse than ever, with one here knowing anything about him."

"He's been missing for two days," said Susie.

"Yes, I know that. *That* I can explain," Lady Partlit began, when sound made her look across and she gave a little scream. "There u are," she gasped.

And there Mr. Jerningham was, looking anything but his usual ex- isite self. He jumped and turned crimson at the sight of Lady rtlit, who now hurried across the stage towards him.

"Go away," he screamed, backing a step or two.

"But it's *all* been a mistake——"

"Ai don't waarn't to hear anything," he shrieked. Then, with mount- g fury, he added: "Thet man took away mai trousers. He delib- tely took them away. You told him to."

"Only to brush them," Lady Partlit wailed.

"Nat to brush at all," Mr. Jerningham cried, wagging a finger at r. "He just took them away. Then he laughed at me. Look, look, at Ai had to put on." And everybody looked at once and dis- vered with joy that Mr. Jerningham was wearing a pair of very ty khaki trousers of a kind that might possibly be used by an under- rdener faced with a morning's rough work. When Mr. Jerningham saw all their eyes fixed upon his awful trousers, he was ang than ever with poor Lady Partlit, and told her to go away at o and that he never never wanted to set eyes on her again. Distre and still babbling, she was led away by Susie, who accompanied to the stage door.

“Very sweet of you, my dear, I'm sure,” said Lady Partlit, broke tearfully. “I felt so unhappy about it, and you will say as little as can, won't you? I've an old friend lives near here, not twenty m away, and I came specially to see—to see you all. That was on Th day, and then I sent a note, just a friendly note, to Mr. Jerningh and sent the car round for him, to bring him out. I thought— so clever, isn't he?—and I thought I might be able to help him, tho I didn't tell him that, my dear, didn't tell him how I might be to—you know—assist him in his career, because I thought—well, ought to be friendly first, because you can help a *friend,* can't y And then of course I never knew my friend would be called a like that, and never dreamt for a moment there would be that ficulty with the car on Friday afternoon, and I do assure you, my d that it was all a mistake and a misunderstanding about the— trousers. He's so *bitter* about them, isn't he? I'm sure he'll n forgive me, but perhaps some time soon, you'll perhaps just—er— something to him, will you? But of course don't *talk* about it, you? I know I can rely on you not to do that. And if there's thing, anything, I can do for you, at any time, my dear—you'r clever too, aren't you? And it's been so nice of me—I mean, of —that is, so nice seeing you again, hasn't it? Do I—Oh, here—yes course. Dear, dear, I must stop one minute before I go out—so setting rushing in like this, and then—everything such a mistak hasn't it? Good-bye.”

Susie stood looking after a moment, drew a deep breath, then turned to the stage, humming a little tune that seemed to amuse Mr. Jerningham was still apologising and protesting to a bewilde Miss Trant, but he gave no sign of being willing to gratify everybo curiosity. Susie took him aside as soon as she could. “Do you kn who that was?” she enquired, not without malice.

ai dear Susie," he protested, "down't talk about that harrible an. She's a fet middle-aged vemp, thet's what she is."

ou know she's Lady Partlit and very rich, don't you?" Susie on.

s a metter of fect, Ai do," he replied loftily, "and Ai don't care."

ut what you don't know, my dear Jerry," she continued softly, hat she practically controls two West End theatres, mostly running cal comedies and revues."

ai God!" Mr. Jerningham turned pale and looked at her with or. "And to think——!" The thought was too much for him, as he looked away it chanced that he caught sight of the trousers as wearing. "Ai don't care," he said stoutly, "she shouldn't have the man to take mai trousers." Nevertheless, he was thoughtful some time, and it was many weeks before he completely lost a in brooding air.

f course, this does make *some* difference," Miss Trant was saying, n they returned to her side. She let the others chatter a little while reconsidered their position. She did not understand yet exactly t had happened to Jerningham, but it was quite clear that he had deliberately absented himself. He had vehemently insisted on the that it was no fault of his he had missed last night's show, and was inely indignant at the suggestion that he had failed them.

ar then," cried the voice of Mr. Oakroyd triumphantly, "what it this?" Somebody was with him.

Vell, boys and girls!"

immy!" cried Susie, rushing at him. The next moment they e all round him, nearly shaking his hand off.

here's a doctor in Mirley—that's where I've been—who's a marvel, onder, a miracle," Jimmy announced solemnly. He still looked er pale and shaky, but he was obviously much better. "He's only ng and he's got a bit of a squint and his teeth stick out—but, let tell you, he could raise the dead, that chap. I went to see him, he talked and tapped, and tapped and talked, until I got fed up. right, doc.,' I says, 'don't mind me. Give me six months and get ly to sign in the space provided for that purpose on the form.' He ghed. 'Nonsense,' he says, 'I can make a new man of you. When did you see a doctor last?' So I told him. Four years ago. 'Th so,' he says. 'And what have you been doing to yourself since?' told him. Trying this and that. 'Thought so,' he says again. you listen to me.' And he gives me some medicine to take and me what to do with myself. Then it was my turn, and by this the wife wasn't in the room. 'Have I to stop here and do no w I asked him. 'Because if so, I shall be dead anyhow. If you te right out,' I told him, 'to get back to the boards, where I belong, complete the cure. And don't just tell me,' I says, 'but tell my w well.' So he told me to see him again and then he'd let me k I tipped him the wink all right. He knew what was what. 'Do no harm to get back to work,' he said this morning. 'May do good.' Collapse of the opposition! So here I am, Miss Trant, and girls, and so long as I take one dose before meals and one I'm fit and ready to crack the old wheezes."

"We were only talking just now, Jimmy," said Joe, "about wh we could give a show at all tonight."

"Give a show tonight!" cried Jimmy. "I should think we do a show tonight, if I've to give it all by myself. Tonight, one hun and twenty-five members of the Mirley and District Co-operativ ciety—prevented, owing to un-fore-seen cir-cum-stances, from h their monthly whist-drive and dance—are coming to Tewborough, for what?—to see *The Good Companions* at the Theatre Royal, w they will occupy the dress circle on special terms given 'em by Nunn. Now let's get busy and see if we can't pack the house."

"Let joy and what's-its-name be unconfined," roared Inigo, doi little step-dance. "Now what do you say, Miss Trant?" he a lowering his voice. "Do *The Good Companions* go on?"

"They do," she replied, smiling and flushing a little.

"We'll learn 'em yet," said Mr. Oakroyd, perspiring with enthusi "We will an' all. Tewborough 'ull noan do us down. Tewborou nowt. It's getten a right slap in the eye this morning."

They played well that night, and a circle packed with membe the Mirley and District Co-operative Society was not slow to appre their efforts. (Even the Treasurer, a deacon at the Baptist Ch who had misgivings about any form of entertainment that vent her than a cantata, was heard to laugh several times.) "I don't it's been a riot," Susie observed, when the show was over, "but swear it's the nearest Tewborough's got to a riot since the Number Touring Company of *A Royal Divorce* first came here in the Dot. And we pulled together, didn't we, children?"

he children admitted that they had and returned to their various ings, which were all either so dismal or sinister that already a place been found for them in the archives, with the cue—"My dear, did ever play a hole called Tewborough?', well content, happy in knowledge that the party was itself again and that tomorrow it would fresh streets and lodgings new. Thus ended the Black Week.

Chapter Seven

ALL STOLEN FROM THE MAIL BAG

I

From Miss Elsie Longstaff to Miss Effie Longstaff

c/o Mrs. Bottomley,
23 Jagger Street,
Luddenstall,
Yorks.
19th December.

Dear Effie:

I got the things alright and ought to have written before this but did some Three Nights and you know what it is don't you, all pac and etc. Now we are here for what you can call a run!—till into New Year at a sort of concert hall and picture place combined, no big but comfy and clean, good stage and lighting etc.—all marvellous c pared with what we have been playing lately I can tell you! Co rooms here too and on my own at last, Thank goodness, I got sick to d of having Susie Dean poking about all the time, not that we are friends we are but you know what it is, my dear! Show looks like g well here, Good old Yorks. I say, if you can get them going up they will stick to you alright every time. I had one encore last n and could have had another but of course I was told programme would stand it. Too much Susie Dean and J. Jerningham in the programme if ask me these days, what with the piano player writing songs for t as well and all that! His name is Inigo Jollifant says its real too!— he is quite a nice boy but the way he goes mooning round S. Dean the way she keeps him dangling would make you sick it if didn't make laugh. Kids game, I call it, but then thats all they are!

Well we look like having a nice Xmas for once. Playing Xmas and then just one show on Boxing Day. Can you get off to come on't suppose you can, and I am wondering if I could manage it just Xmas Day as its not so far. Are you still at the George or have you e to the Vic as you said you might, and does Charlie come in and my and that tall fellow with the specs and all that lot, if they do give them my love and tell them to be good boys till I come back! l guess who I saw here the very second day. I went into Leeds :he morning looking round shops—I nearly bought a new coat in a : shop just off Briggate that was having a sale, large wrap in front straight inlets carried down back and collar and cuffs and flounces ly fur, just like real, and only £4. 19. 6 reduced from seven gns, but ›uldn't run to it though if I wear my old black much longer they be throwing things at me in the street. Well I got in the train to e back in the afternoon and guess who got into the very same carriage, should have seen him jump, that boy we met at Scarborough year be- last when I was with The Bluebells, you remember! It was the r one with the light moustache who acted he was tight that time, day night at the Crown, and he told me he would come to Ludden- whenever I liked and gave me his office address and tel. no. so I i't exactly be lonely. He asked to be remembered to you and I had ell you that his friend was married now. I am sorry for his wife, t do you say, my dear!

am getting you some hankies, will let you have them tomorrow or after. If you have not got anything for me yet make it a pair of stockings bit darker than usual shade I like to go with my red, if ill run to it. Give Uncle Arthur my love and tell him I am getting a pipe once again, and let me know soon as you can if you can : but if you can, no bringing Ethel Golliver this time, you know t it was last time she came along! I like a bit of fun, my dear, but l would get me run out of this show and out of the town as well! true she is living with—you know, the fellow we used to call Pink y—doesn't surprise me! Chin-chin, Effie my dear, and all the best for s!

Elsie.

II

From Mrs. Joe Brundit to her sister, Mrs. Sorly, of Denmark Hi

c/o Mrs. Andrew
5 Clough Street
Luddenstall,
Yorks.
21st Decembe

Dearest Clara:

You will be glad to hear the Luck is in for once—we are here r over the Holidays and the rooms are very nice, the landlady most obli person—so that there will be *no* difficulty about George coming—isn't splendid! If Jim can see him on the train at King's Cross or get s one to see him in, some one *dependable* of course, then either Jim or ever it is seek out a carriage for Leeds with some nice person who is co to Leeds—and ask them if they would mind keeping an eye on Ge on the way—specially *not* letting him go into the corridor by himsel play with the window. Perhaps if you could spare the time, my it would be best—and any nice person would be glad of the com of such a bright boy as George, don't you think? Of course this is fu on than Leeds but then we can meet the train there and that m no changing for him, and Joe has found out the *exact* train, whic 8.45 in the morning from King's Cross, please don't forget—*8.45 in morning,* and the day after tomorrow, that is the 23rd. You could us a wire saying he is safely off. Here is the P.O. for the fare, *ha* course. And I know you will see he has his proper things with him is well wrapped up for the journey—it is *much colder* here of c than it is with you—and has a bun or two and perhaps a bit of choc and some of those comic picture papers to look at. You can ima my dear, what a relief it is to have some one like you that a Mother trust!

So this is going to be a proper Christmas for us for once and I sure I don't know which is the most excited about it, Joe or me we have been buying toys and things for George's stocking—not th believes in S. Claus still of course, I know that, but surely he will to hang his stocking up—and we have made arrangements for a Christmas Dinner—and Miss Trant has got George an invitation to ildren's Party there is to be in the town on Boxing Day afternoon. ow that money is coming in regularly again, not missing a week here d a week there, with rooms and meals to pay for all the time, it makes ch a difference, gives you *Confidence* again—so that—touch wood— ngs look altogether brighter and when we have our own dear child th us and have a happy Christmas altogether, I shall be a new woman! ould you believe it—a month ago I was in the *Depths* of Despair— were all in them, even Joe, who may have his faults but hardly ever es up hoping and taking a cheerful View, as you know—and then rything suddenly turned round. The Show is going magnificently ood houses every night and you could not want a better audience, a l taste for Good music into the bargain. I have been asked to give two ns at a Sacred Concert here, in connection with the Wesleyans or Con- gationals, I forget which—and Joe has been offered 15/— for two items Sunday evening at the Labour Club here, Mrs. Andrews' husband ng a member and though a little rough and ready perhaps a gentleman heart. So we have *Everything* to be thankful for as things have turned .

t seems to be the same with everybody here—though Goodness knows an't last. Jimmy Nunn, our com., says he is better than he has been the last two years and looks it—and our pianist keeps up well and is I said he was from the first as nice a young fellow as you could h to find—and Miss Trant is a perfect lady to us all, does everything can for us—and everybody is not only on speaking terms, and you w how rare that is, but is really friendly and nice—so that we might ost be a Happy Family. I am sure I have never wanted George to w anything about the Stage or to see me at work, and I have told so many a time—haven't I—but I am sure if there ever was a Time lace where it was all right for him to do so, this is it!

he enclosed bag is offered with love, Clara, and gratitude for what have done for George—and best wishes for a Happy Christmas, igh it may not seem as if I meant it when I am taking George away n you just at this festive season, but you can imagine what it means to other! As soon as I saw it in the shop I said to Joe—That will just or Clara, she'll love it. And he said, No she won't, what put that idea your head. And we argued about it quite a time before I found he looking at the wrong thing and thought I was pointing to a fretwork it—just like a Man! He sends his love and best wishes to you and

Jim and says if you can put it into George's head that he wants a clo work train and a signal box etc.—so much the better.

Your loving sister,

Mag

III

From Jimmy Nunn to Mrs. Nunn

c/o Mrs. Shaw,
17 Clough Street
Luddenstall,
Yorks.
23rd December

Dear Carrie,

Just a line to let you know where I am and to say I am feeling be than I have done for the last year or two, and to wish you the Complim of the Season. And I mean it too—a Merry Christmas and a Happy N Year—so don't you go sniffing about it. We can be friends in our o way even if we can't settle down together any more. I think kindly you, Carrie, honestly I do, and I wish you to do the same for me. I kn you don't want to come round the country with me and don't want have anything to do with the Boards any more, and you know very w I can't spend the rest of my life sitting in the back of that shop of yo doing up a parcel now and again. If we are both happy in our own w there's nothing to grumble at, I say. If Alice had lived, it might h been different. Never you mind what people say—tell them to mind t own business. Or say it's by doctor's orders I am still on the move.

I am glad to say you're wrong about this Show. Seeing it that ni at Tewborough, when everybody and everything was all of a doodah, g you a wrong idea of it, I can tell you. It's got going properly now they are eating it here, and before long we shall be making money ou it and good money too. And what you say about the boss, Miss Tr is all wrong too. She's one of the very best. And who do you th I ran into the other day in Leeds—old Tuppy Tanner—he's opening the Royal panto there tomorrow as Baron Hard-up. Just the same fatter than ever—and he was telling me his daughter Mona is pla principal girl at Birmingham this year—makes you think a bit, doesn' —time flies. It doesn't seem more than a year or two since we all that season together in Douglas—do you remember—when Tuppy

the sea and you nursed his little girl through the measles or some-
—and now she's getting her twenty a week at Birmingham and en-
d to be married, Tupp tells me. Wasn't that the time poor Jack
kept getting so tight and got into trouble with that little Italian
an who was at the Palace and we had to keep hiding him? Little
here is always asking me about him—and, my word, I could tell
ome tales if I wanted to—make her hair curl even though she has
ked about a bit herself—but of course I draw it mild. I don't suppose
want to know about her because you never liked poor Jack and he
liked you, but Susie is coming on fast and the first time a big man
knows a winner when he sees one happens to look at her act—it's
bye to the Concert Party for little Susie. And I shan't try to stop
let her have a chance, I say. I wouldn't know what to do with it,
ad a big chance now—I'm getting on and lazy—and the old round
od enough for me. If you ever wanted to see my name up in electric
, you shouldn't have kept me back that time when old Wurlstein
round at Glasgow with the contract in his pocket. You didn't want
k it but I did—but there—that's all done with—I'm up here and you're
with your shop, and we're both comfortable.

at about this for a letter! I'll be writing the Story of My Life next,
this. Now Carrie, no harm done between you and me, what do
ay, and all the best for the New Year. If you see that young doctor,
im I'm still taking that stuff and he's a marvel.

Yrs,
JIMMY.

IV

From Jerry Jerningham to Lady Partlit

c/o MRS. LONG,
6 BURY ROAD,
LUDDENSTALL,
YORKS.
24th December.

LADY PARTLIT:

nk you very much for the cig. case which arrived at The Ionic yes-
. How did you know we were playing here—did you see it in *The*
—it was a bit risky sending such a lovely case like that. Yes I was
urprised to get it and hear from you after what went on between

us at Tewborough that week, but I must say I have been thinkin time I was too hasty and that after all it was not your fault so say now I am sorry—and not just because you have given me s *beautiful* present and said such nice things in yr letter about my I am also sorry you are going out of England for a month or two b I should like you to see the Show again now it is going better have more chance, having got four new nos.—three of them writ our pianist who I must say is clever and a coming man in the son if only he takes his work seriously like I do. I must say the Sh going better than ever I thought it would now—though as you k has got at least four dud people in it, and you are right when y that I am wasted in this C. P. work, though I cannot grumble abo way my act is going here—two or three encores every night and wanted. But you have guessed right when you say it does not sati and I am working hard all the time at new steps etc. so that wh chance does come the people who give it me will not regret it.

No I do not spend my time walking out pretty Yorkshire girls suggest—though if I wanted to I have no doubt I could do so al but even if they were a lot prettier then they are I should not le take up my time just now. And if I was rude I am very sorry and you once again for the lovely present. I have just had new photo and thought you might like a signed copy.

Sincerely yours,

JERRY JERNING

P. S. A letter sent to my perm. ad.—175 Fiscal Street, Birmi will always be sent on to me.

V

Mr. Morton Mitcham to Gus Jeffson Esq., Eccentric Club

THE Io
LUDDENS
YORK
26th Dece

DEAR SIR:

Re. your article "Touring Out East" in last week's *Stage,* you sa Co. was the first to play Penang, but I was there with the old *Pri Pimlico Co.* a good three years before that, running down from pore. Refer "Thirty Years in the Straits Settlements" by J. G. T

or account of Show and a photo of party, self included. *And* I'm
oing strong—now playing at Ionic here, successful winter season with
nown Good Companions Co. (E. Trant & J. Nunn). Forgive cor-
and accept good wishes of another old pro who has done his share
uring Out East—those were great days.

Believe me, Yrs. truly,

MORTON MITCHAM.

VI

*Susie Dean to Miss Kitty Mackay, "The Multi-Million Girl" Co.,
mpire, Cardiff*

c/o MRS. WRIGHT,
11 JAGGER STREET,
LUDDENSTALL,
YORKS.
27th December.

G KITTY:

letter only arrived this morning—after wandering round all over
ce—but I see you are in Cardiff so this will get you at once. It
veet of you to think of me like that—I shan't forget, my dear!—
ree months ago I would have jumped at it, jumped at anything
—to say nothing of South Africa! I've always *longed* to travel—
everywhere—wearing white and helmets and anything—and some
will—with a private carriage or whatever it is the stars do have.
w I have just got to turn it down—don't ask me for exact reasons,
ar, you know how one feels about a thing!—it isn't the money
's absolutely *nothing* wrong with your man's offer, I assure you, and
I am lucky to get it—and here it is only Five a week, though
ously regular, I can tell you, like clockwork—which of course makes
ence. But I have simply got to go on with this Good Companions
ust now—it's been made out of the ruins of Mildenhall's rotten old
Doos—an angel of a woman, very erect, y'know, and tweedy, and
out of the Old Moated Grange from Little Widdleton-on-the-
berry—yes, the real thing—popped up from nowhere in a car—
a bit and looked very brave—paid everything and started us off
all on her own, not knowing the first thing about it! If you could
e her—you would see at once it was the maddest and loveliest thing
er happened, her doing this. And she lost money hand-over-fist

for weeks and weeks—and not a murmur—and now she is beginn get a little back again—and before she *makes* some, I don't stir an inc this show—not if they offer me Daly's—though I must say they l given any signs of doing so yet.

Has ta ivver played Luddenstall, lass?—it's nobbut a little pla Yorkshire—and as usual looks like a Gas Works all spread out—but say this, they know a good show when they see it here—packed every night, *really,* and giving the little girl a hand every nigh should just hear them! And they ask us to parties—I was the regul of the Ball at a dance here on Boxing Night after the show—presen prizes and was given a box of chocolates as big as a suitcase—na shut oop! Really though, as far as Luddenstall and district is con we have the Leeds pantos knocked flat. And I have a feeling th going on—and that sooner or later *Something* will happen. So no S just now, you see.

The two Brundits are still with us—and I'm glad, though they exactly Covent Garden, are they?—but darlings all the same. G Jimmy is still here—better too—and though I know all his jokes heart, about as well as he does—he seems to be as good a little c as there is in C. P. work—and better than some up aloft am electric lights. Jerry Jerningham's here too—and going strong, say, and better to work with than he used to be—and the girls here him round with their tongues hanging out, as usual—but away fr tabs he's the same as ever, 1 gent's outfit, 1 dose of brilliantine, rettes, 1 good opinion of himself, 3 bleats—and then nothing—th little friend Jerry. Then there's our new pianist, who let himself b Inigo Jollifant—he's an amateur really, was a schoolmaster, Ca Varsity and baggy flannel trousers and the same weird tie every "Give me my Pipe" and all that, wants to write books and is ve and Highbrow when he remembers to be—but quite clean an very very clever and he's writing the most marvellous numbers miles and miles beyond anything that comes from Shaftesbury these days. One of these nights, somebody from the West End abouts will hear these numbers and then, my dear, I assure his fo made—absolutely, as he always says. He is really rather sweet have lots of fun together—No, my dear, I'm *not,* quite decided we are just good friends, that's all, at least on my side. You do word about Eric—I do hope it's all right.

If it was Canada instead of South Africa, there's a little man h l be just dying to come with you. He is our property man and carpenter—a little Yorkshireman, not little really but you think of eing little because he is such a darling—and he too popped up nowhere and is now one of the family—you should have seen him eard him this Christmas here, telling all these other Yorkshire people he had been and what he had seen—eh, it wor right champion, lass! ants to go to Canada because he has a daughter there—ahr Lily, he her—and because I'm supposed to be like her (Lord help me!), nply adores me. Oh, I forgot there's also an old boy called Morton am, banjoist and conjurer, we picked up on the road—very weird, e, very weird—not a bad turn, but easily the champion liar of the sion! He certainly has knocked about in his time, but if he was dred and fifty years old and had never stopped touring, he would e lying, the yarns he spins!

, I know it all sounds very queer—and I'll bet we are easily the oddest n the road—but honestly we're the nicest too, and I only wish you nearer and could come and have a look at us. Well, that's all, my -but don't forget I really am most affectionately grateful for the and you do understand, don't you, why I can't accept. But don't d imagine I'm glued to the piffling C.P. business! Not a bit of it! shortly, you'll see, I shall be Blossoming Out—and then I shall expect a cable from S. Africa when the news gets through. Best of luck u all, Kitty darling.

Ever Yours,

SUSIE.

VII

m Inigo Jollifant to Robert Fauntley, Washbury Manor School

c/o MRS. JUGG,
3 CLOUGH STREET,
LUDDENSTALL,
YORKS.
29th December.

FAUNTLEY:

y thinks for sending on those odds and ends so promptly. I ought ve written before, I know. Now I have to send this to the school isk its being forwarded on to you. If the envelope looks messy at

the back, you will know that Ma Tarvin has steamed it open—using
prune for the purpose: and if you don't get it at all, you will kno
has destroyed your letter—ha ha! Your Washbury news was welcom
all very strange—like a message from Mars. Glad I am that the fair
has departed—may she marry the outpost-of-Empire lad in the Suda
may he be bronzed and lean and carry her photograph, in a silver
with him into Wildest Africa. The new man—vice Jollifant—ce
sounds a shrimp—a lesser Felton—and who would have thought that
ble? I sent Ma Tarvin *a Christmas Card!!* It was the sweetest I
find, with little birdies in the snow, and it said:

A heart-felt wish through rain or shine
In memory dear of Auld Lang Syne

or something like that. (Ask her about Christmas Cards when yo
back.) Then, passing a dirty little shop here the other day, a most
coloured and vulgar postcard caught my eye—the caption was "Yo
see a lot at Blackpool" and you can imagine the picture above—an
I despatched, naked and outrageous, to friend Felton in his beauti
fined home at Clifton. Felton is the only human being who still
picture postcards—the British Museum and South Kensington ki
course—but I have the feeling that mine has not been added to the
tion. Dear, dear!

Can you imagine being a Pierrot in Luddenstall, Yorks! Can you i
Luddenstall! It is a smallish town, black as your best hat, and it is
on to other and bigger towns, equally black, by tram lines. I nev
so many trams. They turn them into mountain railways here; y
them going up vertically. All the streets here are at an angle of
45 degrees, everything built of stone, and they run down from a
hillside that is really the end of a huge dark moor. Last Sunday, I
miles and miles on this moor—it has black stone walls like snakes
ing across it—until at last it began to frighten me. It's ridiculous
this place is in England—quite another country really. Both Miss
(she runs this troupe—God knows why!—and comes from the Cots
and I, after much discussion, have agreed upon that. The peopl
work—the women never stop—and go to football matches, drink ol
(very good stuff), listen to Handel's Messiah about twice a week, an
you eat cheese with cake.

I am, as you see, *chez* Jugg. It's a capital name for the gen
because nearly every time I see him he has a jug in his hand, being

st stalwart devotees of the aforesaid old beer, which has to be "fetched
’ He can give old Omar himself points in not believing in anything,
has cut out the book of verse, most of the loaf, and the Houri stuff,
st sticks to the jug, though he has added a clay pipe and is one up
nar there. He is very dry and cynical. Mrs. Jugg reminds me
y of Henry the Eighth (she must be roughly the same shape, I think);
rks harder than anybody I have ever heard of; and always looks so
exasperated that you would think her cooking would be atrocious,
everything she does is slammed in at the last minute, but it all
ut to be beautiful in the end—it's like a conjuring trick. The only
nent she has is going "to t' chapel o' Sunday neet," but after a lot
ment I persuaded her to accept a ticket to our show the other night.
was the result? "Eh!" she said. But it's a long sound she makes,
like a sheep. "Eh!" she said, "it wer right good but I missed most
ecause I fell asleep. Seat were so comfortable and I wer so tired."
seemed to me rather pathetic. I've been a fortnight here now and
very pally with both Juggs. They are the best people I've lodged
far, and this is our best town, in spite of its being so queer. We've
me horrors, I assure you. You don't know what Merrie England
until you tour it with a pierrot troupe.

ou remember telling me I ought to do something with those little
used to improvise? Well, I am making them into songs now
everybody seems to like them—and the people in the show, es-
the chief girl here (her name is Susie Dean and besides being a
elightful girl, she really is a genius—you wait!), seem to think I
to make some money out of them. I think I shall try soon. I've
two essays—quite good too—and sent them to several papers,
ey've come back—"Editor regrets," etc.—every time. It staggers
en I consider the bosh they do print, but I suppose it's difficult for an
—a pierrot at that!—to get in; and I feel like trying to make as
noney as I can out of this silly song-writing stunt and then write
re. Meanwhile I pound the keys every night and take it easy during
. We're an amusing crowd—we had a really jolly Christmas, best
had, I think—and though I don't see myself going on with this for
far it's more fun than ramming French and History into the off-
of our Empire builders and then trying to eat the Tarvin rissoles
wed prunes. Luddenstall is as ugly as an old road engine, but it

has one advantage over Washbury Manor, my dear Fauntley—it's
And so am I—never more so. And I hope you are too, and wil
a good New Year.

Yours sincerely,
Inigo Jollif

VIII

From Miss Trant to Mrs. Gerald Atkinson (née Dorothy Chillin
Kenya Colony

Luddens
York
31st Decen

My dear Dorothy:

Your last letter only arrived here two days ago. I am so glad y finding things so much better and that Gerald has got the extra l wanted. You sound so happy. Isn't it fantastic—you out there, a here? No, I have not been back to Hitherton at all. If we ha nearer these holidays I should have gone, just to see your dear and mother, the Purtons, and everybody, but it could not be don sent letters and little presents instead. It's been the *most* absurd mas I ever had—here in this dark and bleak little Yorkshire manufa town, where everybody talks like our delicious little Yorkshire p man, Oakroyd, whom I described to you before. Of course eve seems dreadfully rude at first. You go into a shop and they say: what do *you* want, young woman?"—though the "young" is rathe forting. But I am used to it now, and really nobody could hav kinder and nicer than these people and we were lucky—for once!— here during the holidays because they are Christmassy sort of As you insist on having what you call "theatrical intelligence," I m that I am actually at last making a *Profit!*—that is, on each week, of course I have not yet made up what I have lost so far. But exciting to have really crowded and enthusiastic audiences, enjoying thing, and it's made the most wonderful difference to the members party, who are working splendidly now.

It's ridiculous, of course, but I am becoming the complete th manager. The other day I actually had an offer for the whole tr and refused it! After the show one night last week, a card was in with a request for an interview, and in came a large fat shabb ther beery and pimply but very amiable (too amiable!), and he was r. Ernie Codd, from Leeds. He insisted on shaking my hand and eathing on me for about five minutes, and in a very wheezy voice ept saying "Pretty little show! Taking little show! Congrats on the ow, Miss Bant! I'm Ernie Codd! They all know Ernie! Now listen ere, just listen!" When at last I succeeded in getting back my hand and suring him I *was* listening, he said something about having the scenery d props and script of a revue (I think its name was "And You're An-her!"—I know he said it was "a Winner and a sure-fire Screamer!") d one of the neatest little troupes of dancing girls I had ever set eyes outside the West End radius, and he would take over my Good Com-nions lock, stock, and barrel at Fifty Per, or sign them on separately ith myself, Miss Bant, as assistant manager on a profit-sharing basis. I am ying, my dear, to give you an impression of the way he rattled all this off, ith any amount of gesticulation and heavy breathing. It took me twenty inutes—and even then I had to bring in Mr. Nunn—to make him believe at I had no intention of accepting his offer. I never saw a man so sur-ised—or at least appear to be so surprised—as he was when he finally derstood that we did not want to be taken over by Mr. Codd and his iends. I was very amused (and would have been more amused if Mr. odd had been rather cleaner and not so much given to shaking hands) t I was also rather thrilled. Mr. Nunn, who knows all about these things d is my chief adviser, was delighted, and said that though he would not ust Ernie Codd as far as he could see him, the offer was a feather in our ps. It must all sound very silly to you, miles and miles away, but you ust allow me my little triumphs. Things really are looking up.

Some local Commercial Travellers' Association gave a children's party re the other afternoon and somehow the secretary got hold of my name d insisted on Susie—the very charming and clever girl I told you about—d I giving the prizes. We loved it. And talking of children, I must tell u about Mr. and Mrs. Joe Brundit, my baritone and soprano. I hope you member my description of them because the story rather hangs on that. ut, as I told you before, they have a little boy called George, whom they th worship. He lives with an aunt at Denmark Hill, but they were able have him with them this Christmas here. For days they thought and lked about nothing else. Every penny they had went on toys for his ocking and for treats for him. When the time came, they were nearly lirious with excitement. I remember hoping then that he was a nice little y who would appreciate what they were doing for him. And of course—

that sounds pessimistic, but you know how wretchedly things so often tu out—he wasn't a nice little boy, but a horrid sulky stupid little wretch. H didn't like any of the toys they gave him, and told them so very plainl He didn't like Luddenstall, and kept saying he wanted to go back to De mark Hill. He broke some things at their lodgings and was very rude t the landlady, who promptly slapped him (a thing I have been tempted t do myself), with the result that Mrs. Joe quarrelled with her at once an finally had to find new lodgings for them all. They brought him to th theatre and he was such a nuisance that everybody said he must not b allowed to come again. He went to the children's party, got into mischi at once, then was sulky and cross, and ended by being sick. Never wa there such a disastrous visit! And all the time the poor things have bee pretending they were not disappointed or anything, until we did not kno whether to laugh or cry. On the whole, I felt more like weeping. Po simple Joe!—and poor simple Mrs. Joe!—she is tremendously dignified an superior, as I told you, but really, if anything, she's the simpler of the tw They have decided now that George isn't strong—put it all down to i health—though the little wretch is really as strong as an ox and only want a good slapping from time to time to keep him in order.

My dear, if you are going to be so absurd, I shall begin to wish I ha never told you about that episode—for that's all it was. Of course I haven seen "Dr. Hugh McFarlane on my travels." Why should I have? I don even know if he lives in this country, though I must confess I feel confiden he does live somewhere, still exists. I don't suppose he would even reco nise me now. Yes, I know "there is such a thing as a Medical Register, as you put it—I'm sure you're becoming quite Colonial and brusque thes days—but I have never had a peep at it, no, not the tiniest peep. If yo could see me these days, you would understand why I am not worryin about any episode from ancient history. In less than a week, we move o again. Did I tell you I had made Hilda co-operate with me?—she helpe me with some dresses for a sort of Mid-Victorian song-scena we are givin now—and one that I planned myself!

For the last few days, the hill-tops to the West have been white, and had a glimpse the other morning of the moors there, all silent and almos covered with snow, quite lonely and terrifying, and now it is beginning t snow properly down here and all the black roofs and hard lines are dis appearing so that even Luddenstall looks rather like a place in an old fairy tale! And very soon the bells will ring in the New Year. I hope it wil a happy one for you, my dear. I'm sure it will, though. And somehow ike the sound of it too. Love to you both.

Yours,

Elizabeth.

IX

d as the snow drifted high on the moorland above and came whirling wn in soft flakes to the valley below, until at last every roof in Lud-nstall was thick and whitened and all the streets were touched with rthern magic; as they raised their glasses and joined hands and sang chorus, and bells that seemed as old and mysterious as the flying d feathered night itself rang out the Old, rang in the New—the last er of all was being carried through a black and dripping railway cut-g in the hills, to be slung with a thousand others on board a liner t would soon go hooting through the dark to Canada:

Dear Daughter:

am writing these lines to say I am still in the pink and hoping you are same. We are now in Good Old Yorks, and so had a good and merry as. I had my Xmas dinner with Landlady and Family and had goose d pudding and etc. I wish you had been there Lily, to keep your old her company. I went on tram to Bruddersford and called at 51. Your ther was looking poorly but when I asked her said she was alright and she was a bit short with me could get nothing out of her. Albert is l there but did not see him and was glad not to but I saw our Leonard o is doing well. Your Mother told me you had not written to her only me so I think Lily you had better write to her as well sometime for she your Mother when all is said and done and as I say is looking poorly. e Good Comps. are going well here and will do so, if I know any thing, other places on the road. Wishing you and Jack a Happy New Year d all the best. Keep on writing to me at 51 and they will send on. And p your heart up Lily we will have a good laugh the two of us yet together, ith love and kisses,

from yr Father,

J. Oakroyd.

BOOK THREE

Chapter One

A WIND IN THE TRIANGLE

I

E March wind went shrieking over the Midland Plain. Under
a sky as rapid, ragged and tumultuous as a revolution, all the
g water, the gathered thaws and rains of February, filling the
and spreading over innumerable fields, was ruffled and whitened,
the day glittered coldly. There was ice even yet in this wind,
eady there were other things too, shreds and tatters of sunlight,
spicy gusts, distant trumpetings of green armies on the march.
you were one of the patient men of the fields, following the
hining flanks of your horses across the ten-acre and already hear-
: sap stirring, you did not know what to do in the face of such
l. It was up to all manner of tricks. "Grrrr! Get indoors
y there!" it would go screaming. "Poke the fire! Whe-ew!"
might send a lash of hail after you. But then not quarter of an
ter, it might be crying "Come out, come out! The year's begun,"
ng primroses, and spilling a little pale sunlight down the road.
oment you did go out, however, it would give a sharp twitch,
ng the sky again, and with a long *Whe-ew Grrrr!* would sting
eeks and set your eyes watering. A most mischievous wind.

y it went, across the central plain of England, until at last it
d upon those three little industrial towns, Gatford, Mundley
ort, that are known as the Triangle, and more recently, since
ns gave themselves up to the mass production of cheap cars, the
iangle. There are very few towns in this island so close together
ord, Mundley and Stort, and a stranger might easily imagine
ere all one town. On the other hand, there are hardly any
owns that seem further away from anywhere else: Gatford
Mundley and Stort, and Mundley and Stort creep closer to one

another; but the three of them appear to be almost as remote as stellation from any other place of importance. Those short no runs on the railway from Gatford to either Manchester or Birmin always seem miraculous; and when that daily procession of bran cars, shiny saloons or chassis with drivers perched on boxes, slides down the London Road, it strikes the visitor as a most hazardou terprise, an adventure. The Trianglers themselves, too, regard this departure of new *Imperial Sixes* and *Lumbdens* and *Baby Sc* as part of a great adventure. Nowadays cars pour out and r pours into the Triangle. It is said that J. J. Lumbden, the s old Lumbden who kept the bicycle shop in Cobden Street, Gatf worth nearly half a million and steadfastly refuses the most gi offers from America. The Sceptre people are building yet an factory between Mundley and Stort. And nobody can say th anything tinny about the *Imperial Six,* the pride of North Gatfor Stort, where every other man is a mechanic. There is hardly a s boy in the Triangle, even in South Gatford, where there are de villas and tennis clubs and boulevards, who does not groan wit patience, to think he is wasting his time with stuff about Magna and Rivers of South America and Adverbs when he might be w in one of the car factories, swaggering out at half-past five, very and knowing. Useless to talk to the Triangle about bad trad what might be done with the unemployed; it never knew such before; Gatford is nearly twice the size it was twenty years ag Mundley and Stort, invaded by mechanics from every part of the lands, are growing visibly, at the rate of so many new little red per fine working day. These are adventurous times for the three The March wind, itself supremely adventurous, pounced upon with glee. Here, it seemed to shout, was something better to pla than naked fields and branches and thin tremulous sheets of w

It swooped down and charged the steady swarm of cars, the that lumber from Gatford to Mundley, Stort to Mundley, Gatf Stort, the buses that dodge and hoot at and overtake these tram whipped off a loose tile and even a chimney pot here and there. seeking out any tattered posters on the hoardings and turning into drums, it rounded up all the odd pieces of paper in the stree mpelled them to join in a witches' Sabbath. This most mischievous nd then found an open window on the second floor of a building in ictoria Street, Gatford, sent some papers skimming from the table the floor, and compelled a certain gentleman, who had been staring some figures and now found himself shivering, to look up and speak ossly to his companion and employee. This is Mr. Ridvers, but when is in this tiny office he calls himself the Triangle New Era Cinema o., and it is from here he controls the destinies of The Tivoli Picture lace, Gatford, The Coliseum Picture House, Mundley, and the Royal inema, Stort, the only three cinemas of any importance in the district.

"For God's sake, Ethel," he said, "shut that window. Look at those tters—all over the damn floor. Besides, it's cold."

From behind her typewriter, Ethel gave him a curious sideways look. e was a girl in her twenties, with a rather flat Mongolian face, hard ring eyes and a thick daubed mouth. "It was you who wanted it en," she remarked. "Told you it was cold."

"Well, I want it shut now," he grunted, without looking up again om the papers in his hand.

"All right, all right," and she closed the window. There was noth- g respectful in her tones, and there was something downright dis- spectful in the way she moved. The exaggerated thrust and lift of her oulders gave the impression that her body was making really impudent marks about her employer. There was a suggestion that it had the ght to make such remarks and that he knew very well it had.

Mr. Ridvers examined the figures before him a minute or two longer, an stood up and threw the papers on the table. He found a half- oked cigar in the ash-tray, relit it and pulled furiously at it, frowning l the time. Ethel watched him out of the corner of her eye with nusement. He had been in a bad mood all morning and now he as obviously very angry indeed. As a matter of fact, he was a middle- ged man who ate too much, drank far too much whisky, took too tle exercise, and was plagued by an outraged liver. He had his ievances, but it was really the sudden cold lash of the wind that had w put a sharp edge on his temper.

"Well?" And there was a certain malice in Ethel's query.

"Well nothing!" he exploded. "These returns are worse than I thought. It was Stort last week. I suppose it'll be Mundley this wee I'd never have believed it. These flaming little pierrots are knockin hell out of the returns."

"I told you what it would be."

"Oh, for God's sake, don't start that! Never knew a woman y who didn't think she'd gone and told me everything. People he must have gone balmy. Pierrots!"

"They're crowded out every night," said Ethel.

"Yes, I know they are. I'm not silly. Even so, they oughtn't to ha knocked us like this. Damn it all, there ought to be enough mone in these three towns to keep us going as usual even if they are crowde out. I've given 'em good programmes."

"I don't know about that," Ethel replied coolly. "You know ve well you cut it a bit on the renting."

"What if I did? Matter of fact I had to cut it to show Farrow an his Syndicate a good margin. And what diff'rence does it make, wh I paid for the renting. They've never seen the bloody pictures befor have they? Well then! No, it's this pierrot show that's done it. Wh ever would have thought it! Talk about luck!"

"I hear they're putting the prices up too," said Ethel, who seeme to delight in flicking him on the raw.

"They would!" cried Mr. Ridvers bitterly. "That means all the le money for us. Seems to me if these people spend two and four they' finished for the week. Luck! They won't even let me smell it. And Mr. Ridvers made a number of sounds to express his disgust an then savagely jammed his cigar against the ash-tray.

"I don't know what you're going on like this for," said Ethel, wh probably knew very well. "A few bad weeks won't kill you."

Mr. Ridvers made a large gesture of despair. "Oh, have a bit o sense, Ethel. Won't kill me! I don't know what you sit there for, honestly don't."

"Oh, don't you?" cried Ethel, staring at him hard. "Well, I'm no always sitting here, am I, *Mister* Ridvers? Trying to turn me into dummy or what?"

"All right, Ethel, easy, easy," he replied, giving her shoulder a per functory pat, under which it squirmed. "But I've told you befor arrow and his P.P.H. Syndicate," he went on, with ferocious de-peration, "are making me an offer for my three halls. You know at? All right then. That-offer-is-to-be-based-on-two-months'-returns--these-three-halls. The price is according. Or, if they don't like the ok of them, they won't deal. They'll buy elsewhere. Or—what's a amn sight worse—they'll come here and build their own. And you now as well as I do what's happened to our returns. And I ask you, ho'd have thought a piebald, blink-eyed, bread-and-dripping little pier-ot show, filling in time till it can get a pitch on the sands again, ould have knocked 'em all silly here like that!"

"I went out to Mundley last night to see them," said Ethel. "Fellow ok me. Packed out they were too. It's a clever show—bit slow in arts, 'specially the women, but it's clever. They've a boy there who ances—name's Jerningham—who got me all right. Talk about danc-g! And looks! He's got the film fellows well beaten, that boy has. ricky songs too."

"You're sillier than I thought you were," Mr. Ridvers growled. With your dancing boys! They've another week at Mundley Rink, aven't they, after this? And then back to Gatford here again. I see hey've got the Hippodrome plastered with bills already. And I went Billy Roberts and told him I didn't want 'em back if possible and e owed me a good turn or two and he said he'd stiffen the terms—hey hadn't taken it again then, you see—and make this woman who's unning the show rent it and shove all sorts of responsibility on to her. ut that's not frightened her, seemingly."

"Why should it?" said Ethel. "I know it wouldn't frighten me. he's safe as houses here now—can't lose."

Mr. Ridvers thought for a few moments. "Here," he cried finally, where is this woman or whoever it is that's running these *Companions* whatever they call themselves? Over at Mundley, I suppose?"

"No, she's not. They're all here, in Gatford, been staying here all he time and just running out to Stort and Mundley at night for the how. Her name's Trant, and she's staying at *The Crown."*

"You seem to know a devil of a lot about them," said Mr. Ridvers, cing her across the table. "Quite one of the pierrot fanciers, aren't you! Must be the dancing boy. Well, don't start any tricks, tha all."

"I don't start tricks," she replied shrilly. "And if I did, I wouldn ask your permission, Mr. Charlie Ridvers. You get your money's wor out of me, don't you? Start tricks! You're a nice one to talk."

"Oh, dry up," said Mr. Ridvers. "Can't you see I've enough dam bother on my hands without you making trouble? I'm worried, tha what I am, and I don't mind admitting it." He took down his h and overcoat. "I'm going across to *The Crown* to have a little bit a talk to this pierrot woman—what's her name?—Trant. That's wh I'm going to do."

"And a fat lot of good it'll do you," cried Ethel. "What can yo say to her? Silly, I call it."

"Never mind what you call it. And never mind what I can say her," he replied, with the air of a man who had produced a crushin retort. He had no idea himself what he could say to this Miss Tra that would be of the slightest use, but he looked both knowing an truculent. "What's it now? Half-past two? Back just after thre I dare say." With his hand on the knob, he stopped, turned roun and looked darkly at Ethel. "She's going to hear something from m good or no good."

"Go on then, get it off your chest," she replied. "Perhaps you'll fe better after that." She gave the typewriter carriage a push so that shot across and rang its little bell, a contemptuous, dismissing litt bell.

All the way down the stairs, Mr. Ridvers told himself that Eth was getting altogether too uppish and was not much use in the offi any longer and not very much use anywhere else the way she w these days, and that it was always the same if you allowed yourself have a bit of fun with them because the little bitches took advanta in a minute and it was time he stopped having these little games. Th wind was very lively as he walked up Victoria Street, and he damne it heartily. It whistled round his legs, tried to snatch his hat, flun scraps of waste paper at him, and made him feel liverish again. A *The Crown* he found he had to stop at the bar and add two mor whiskies, very quick ones, to the supply he had taken in during h rly lunch; but they did not make his grievances seem any less or store his lost temper.

II

he Crown is the oldest and most comfortable hotel in The Triangle, d Miss Trant had stayed on there because she liked the place and had en able to claim the small sitting-room upstairs for her own use. e was in there now, talking to Inigo Jollifant, who had just had nch with her. These two were now very good friends indeed, and igo had been giving her all the news of the troupe, for she had only st returned from a visit—the first since Autumn—to Hitherton. On e little table were a number of papers, rough accounts and letters, at she had been looking over during the morning.

"I don't know what to do," she was saying, raising her voice as the ind rattled the old window frames. "To tell you the truth, I haven't en able to think properly since I came back. I feel—do you know?—stless."

"My own feeling, absolutely," said Inigo. "It's the wind, I think—e wind on the heath, brother. Spring's on the way, that must be it."

"On the way!" she cried. "It's here."

"Not here," he corrected her gravely. "Not in Gatford. There may a spot of it somewhere on the edge of Mundley or Stort. But tell not in Gatford."

"Well, it may not be here, but it's everywhere else. You should see e flowers at Hitherton—already."

Inigo looked at her curiously. "Shall I tell you what I think? I ink you're tired of it—not of us——"

"Certainly not of you," she interrupted. "None of you."

"No, not of us, as people, but of the business itself. I suspect you've d enough now."

Miss Trant laughed, quickly, nervously. "And I was thinking just e same about you all through lunch—the very same thing—that you ere tired of it but would not admit it."

"The two ama-chewers, eh! Had enough!" He thought for a mo-ent. "No, I can't say I've definitely felt that, not quite that." He sitated.

"Suppose"—and she held him with a level glance—"Susie left us The instant look of horror on his expressive face brought a smile her own. "There you are, you see," she cried, in friendly triumph.

"As a matter of fact," he remarked, serious now, "Susie herself rather restless. And she doesn't seem to be particularly keen on t Bournemouth offer. None of the younger ones are, you know. Jernin ham seems uneasy about it, and Elsie—who you would think wou jump at it—doesn't seem very interested. As I told you, it's the o hands, Jimmy and the Joes and Mitcham, who are all for it and so w ried because you won't decide at once. They think it's a marvello offer, absolutely, and so it is from their point of view—resident seaso guaranteed and all the rest of it. All their dreams come true."

"I know, poor dears. It's just what they've been wanting. There no reason why we shouldn't accept it. After all, I needn't be there, n all the time, need I?"

"Not at all. You can take the whole summer off, if you like."

"But really I don't like. That's the trouble. Please don't tell t others this, will you? But somehow the idea of going there, just s tling down in Bournemouth for nearly six months, doesn't appeal to *m* and on the other hand, I don't just want to march off, though of cour if they thought they could get on now without me, I could leave alt gether."

"Oh, don't do that," cried Inigo, alarmed. "Besides, although must be making money now—quite a lot, I imagine—you can't have g back all you've spent yet."

"No, I haven't," she admitted, with an involuntary glance at th papers on the table. "We're doing so wonderfully well here that the really is a good profit, so good that I feel like a bloated profiteer an capitalist, but actually I'm still about two hundred pounds to the ba And the people who have taken my house at Hitherton now say th all kinds of things must be done to it—it's very old, you know, an has been rather neglected—and apparently I must do them and I shu der to think what it will cost."

"Well, there you are then. You must carry on and rake in the dib shekels, or boodle. We can't allow you to retire still losing on th show."

"I don't want to retire," she told him emphatically. "I should hate . It's just that—well, like you—I feel restless and don't know what do."

"I rather think that Jimmy and Mitcham and possibly Joe, the anxious ds, are downstairs in the bar, in the hope of getting the latest bulletin ultimatum. I rather think so," Inigo concluded lightly.

"Oh dear!" Miss Trant stared at him. "I know they're dreadfully nxious about the Bournemouth business. Inigo, will you please slip own and tell them to wait a little longer because I may want to e them? I can't see them this minute though because I must make my mind first. I hope waiting down there doesn't mean having lot of drinks."

"It does," replied Inigo gravely. "Always. And more especially at crisis, when the beverages come to hand almost mechanically. How- ver, I'll slip down and tell them." He went out but almost immediately terwards popped his head in the door. "A gent to see you," he an- ounced. "Name of Ridvers and smell of whisky. Will you have a ok at him?"

Miss Trant, surprised, said she would, and the next moment Inigo ad gone and a heavy man, of a somewhat swollen and purplish cast countenance, was standing in the doorway. His bowler hat was lted towards the back of his head and he had a cigar in his mouth. e came in without removing either hat or cigar.

"I am Miss Trant," rising and regarding him with no great favour. Do you want to see me?"

"That's it. My name's Ridvers, and I don't mind telling you I'm he Triangle New Era Cinema Company, *Un*limited. Well-known here, *ery* well-known, *not* a stranger to the district." He paused, looked at er, then took out his cigar and looked at that, shooting a little cloud f smoke at his companion.

"I'm afraid I don't understand," said Miss Trant, stepping back from he smoke.

"You're Miss Trant who's running these what's it Companions, pier- ot show, aren't you?" said Mr. Ridvers heavily.

"Yes. What do you want?" And she looked pointedly first at the at, then at the cigar, then at the whole man, But Mr. Ridvers was not to be hurried. His manner said very plai that he had his own methods of approach to a topic. He pursed up thick lips, stuck the cigar between them again, half-closed his eyes a wagged his head, and then growled through the cigar: "Doing dam well here, aren't you?"

"I beg your pardon?" Miss Trant looked at him in amazement.

"Not-at-all, not-at-all." He rested himself against the back of a hi chair, took out his cigar, stared at her, and said again: "Doing damn w here, aren't you?"

Miss Trant still stared.

"And do you know"—and here Mr. Ridvers used his cigar as a poin and contrived to spill some ash over the chair—"at whose expense you doing so damn well? At mine. And I'm here to have a little t about it."

"I don't want to have a talk about it," she cried.

"P'raps not. But I do." He made movements that suggested he w about to sit down.

This was too much for Miss Trant. "Will you please go away once?" she suddenly blazed at him, much to his astonishment. "H dare you come in here behaving like this! I don't want to talk to y about anything." She turned her back on him and opened the wind instantly admitting a cold and disturbing rush of our old acquaintan the March wind, which at once determined to try and choke Mr. Ridv with his own cigar smoke.

He coughed, spluttered, and cursed. But he was really shocked, he had his own code of manners and now they had been outraged.

"I hope you don't call yourself a lady," he exclaimed, in genui indignation. "What's the idea? Going on like that!"

Miss Trant swept round, marched past him to the door and threw open. "Now will you please go?" she said, white with annoyan "If you don't go, I will, and I shall ask the proprietor to turn you of my room."

Mr. Ridvers advanced and looked closely at her for a moment. Th he gave his hat a tap to bring it forward, made a clicking noise, claimed "Well, my God!", and went click-clicking down the corrid When he reached the bar again, he was in a very bad temper. T himself, the landlord, was there, talking to two strangers, a long ldish fellow in a ridiculous overcoat and a short man with a peer- onkey face.

t's have another, Tom," said Mr. Ridvers gruffly. "I need it."

, after swallowing half his whisky, he burst out with "That's a of a woman you've got upstairs, Tom."

ho's this you're talking about, Charlie?"

ant or whatever her name is," said Mr. Ridvers heartily. "Run- pierrot show here, till the sands are ready again, I suppose. Hello, s the matter with you?" Tom was nodding and winking at him.

ese two gentlemen here," said Tom, whose business it was to in with everybody, "are members of that troupe. Very good show, ell me."

d let me tell you, sir," said the taller stranger, who is no stranger being no other than Mr. Morton Mitcham, "that's no way to talk a lady in public." And his eyebrows completed the rebuke.

at is so," said his companion, Mr. Jimmy Nunn, sternly, and shut- ne eye as he looked at Mr. Ridvers. "Just keep your bitches to elf."

Ridvers gave a short laugh and cast a contemptuous eye over the y pair. "So this is what they're all paying their money to see, is it, ' Tut-t-t-t. Broken-down old pros. Buskers. I wish I'd known they looked like when I saw that woman upstairs. She's not all Tom." He tapped his forehead. "You want to keep an eye on Pierrots! Tut-t-t-t."

ho is this—er—gentleman?" And the irony Mr. Mitcham, raising ebrows to a monstrous height, threw into that last word was ing.

w then, gentlemen," said Tom. "Let's be friendly. This is Mr. rs who runs the cinemas round here."

!" said Mr. Mitcham significantly, looking at Mr. Nunn.

!" replied Mr. Nunn.

hat are you ah-ing about?" demanded Mr. Ridvers truculently.

you remember that ninepence we threw away the other afternoon t dirty little place, Nunn?" Mr. Mitcham enquired.

d we wondered how people could pay money to go in," replied

Jimmy. "Is that the place? And you thought it was raining in a pictures, they were so old."

"And you were asking me how the management had the face to that cracked old piano and a girl to play it who'd never had any le That's the place, isn't it, Nunn? Yes, I thought so." He sighed d

"You're very funny, aren't you?" said Mr. Ridvers, looking from to the other very fiercely. "But don't think I'm going to take it *you* because I'm not." He did not say from whom he would t but there was a suggestion that he had taken it from somebody recently. "Couple of buskers! Going round with the hat! pierrots! Let me tell you this, the pair of you, and you can tell that

"Easy, Charlie, easy," said the landlord, who looked anything bu himself.

"You want a good mouth-wash," cried Jimmy angrily to Mr. Ri "It's asking for a good clean-out, that big mouth of yours."

"I've been in places where you'd have had a bullet through you that—zip!—for saying less than you've said about a lady." An Mitcham, drawing the Silver King round him with a noble gest scorn, attempted to wither the furious cinema proprietor with one nificent glance.

"Go and have a look at yourselves," roared Mr. Ridvers, at the time attempting to have a closer look at them himself, a movemen made them back a little, for Mr. Ridvers, with his heavy shoulder great thrusting jowl, was at that moment a very formidable figure. say what I like, and you won't stop me and you know you won't you see? I'll say what I like."

"That's the way, Mister," said a cheerful voice from behind "That's the way to talk. Let a man say what he likes, that's my —s'long as he doesn't hurt anybody. Morning, boys. Any news? what's up?"

"I'll tell you what's up, Joe," said Jimmy in tones that did not c his relief. And he plucked Joe by the elbow and in two whi sentences told him what had happened.

The massive Joe then stepped forward and examined Mr. R curiously, as if there stood before him some new kind of creature ell," said Mr. Ridvers, standing his ground but not looking as if ıs certain of it, "what's wrong with you?"

l tell you what's wrong with me," said Joe softly. "I'm a pierrot, as these two. A dirty little pierrot. A broken-down pro. Just the Miss Trant, the lady upstairs, pays me my money. Just the same. I'll tell you what's the matter with you. You've two names. One's and the other's Walker." He jerked an enormous thumb towards oor. "Off! Outside! You've just time. Oh!"—and here Joe ed his head wistfully and a certain rapturous note crept into his —"I could give you such a slugging. You're just the right shape ize, you are."

Ridvers had reached this conclusion even before Joe announced it. eparted. He ought to have stopped when he reached the door, l round, scowled at them all and produced the sinister laugh, the ollow "Ha! Ha! Ha-ha-ha-ha-*ha!";* and indeed it is a pity he can- brought in every other page or so now to give us a warning "Ha! but the fact remains that he went without a backward glance n complete silence. He was, however, at boiling point, and a ical scowl, a little fist-shaking, and thirty seconds' sinister mirth, have done him good. In Victoria Street the wind welcomed him ously as an old playmate, but his only response was to demand should first be damned and afterwards blasted. And when Ethel him if any good had come of his little talk, his reply was of such ıre that her typewriter was heard no more that day in the office Triangle New Era Cinema Company.

III

oe put down her cup, then cocked her head in order, it seemed, e her full attention to the wind. "Just listen to that, my dear," marked complacently, rather as if she had shares in some company ıanufactured March weather. "Wild, I call it. March came in lion and seems to be going on like one. That makes it all the o be in here, doesn't it?"

e, who was sitting in an enormous chair, specially introduced into oom for the benefit of Joe, curled her legs underneath her and ed down. "Couldn't be nicer," she said lazily. "I love it when it's rotten outside and I'm not there and haven't to be there for an or two. It makes railway carriages cosier, even." And she rubbed cheek against the side of the chair.

"When Joe went out to see if there was any news," Mrs. Joe tinued, "I was saying to myself I could just do with a nice little I must get my work." Having found a complicated and very u piece of knitting, bright pink in hue, she beamed across the hear her visitor, then settled herself in her chair, and looked cosy and fidential yet still majestic, like a queen off duty.

"Now this is really nice," she exclaimed. "You know, if only G was here and in rather better health than he was at Christmas— remember he was not at all well then, though Clara says he is all now—do you know what I should call myself?"

Susie from the depths of her chair replied that she didn't.

"Stop!" cried Mrs. Joe in a startling and dramatic fashion, at the time, sitting bolt upright. "Stop! I've no right to ask for Everyt I don't say—I *won't* say—if only George was here. I'll say this. Do know what I call myself *now?* I call myself—for once—a H Woman." She looked triumphantly at Susie and then looked sev at her knitting and shook it a little, just as if it was about to inte with some impudent remark.

"You like it here, don't you?" said Susie.

"To be quite honest with you, my dear, I do. It suits me," re Mrs. Joe with decision, "down to the ground. I dare say I can d share of grumbling. If Things aren't going well, I face the fact ask others to do the same. When they do go well, I say so. Just it would be a sin to grumble, it really would."

"But I'm not grumbling," Susie protested.

"Quite so. Here we are, nice and cosy together, having our chat in front of a fire, a good fire, a most liberal fire I call it——"

"They're jolly good about fires round here, aren't they?"

"I can say that for mine, Mrs. Pennyfeather," cried Mrs. Joe judicial enthusiasm. "She'd never stoop so low as to send in about pieces and a shovelful of dust and call that a shilling scuttle. Most li in the matter of coal. Well, here we are, listening to the wind blo outside and not caring about it at all, and knowing that tonight a good audience, an appreciative audience, out at Stundley or Gort vherever it is we're playing this week. Yes, Mundley, of course. 's the one, isn't it—the one where the trams go all round the funny statue in the middle—Mundley? I find these three towns terribly using, don't you? Though of course as Dates they couldn't be better. then such unusually good rooms these are too, aren't they? Look is one. Have you noticed the oil paintings?"

nearly every bit of wall space was covered with brownish canvases, ed lavishly in gilt but mysterious and curiously cotton-woolly in their cts, Susie could reply with truth that she had noticed the oil paint- "I've been wondering for some time," she said, peeping out of her to have another glance round at them, "what they're about. They seem to be *about* anything much, do they?"

he work of Mrs. Pennyfeather's uncle, I understand," said Mrs. Joe, e tones now took on a certain new dignity, befitting the tenant of a room and art gallery. "An amateur—he was a seedsman or iron- ger, I forget which—but very gifted and quite up to professional lard. Above it in some ways, I think."

must say, Mrs. Joe, they all look alike to me," said Susie. "Yet don't seem to have any sort of subject—unless it's the inside of a ess—you know, one of those brown woolly ones—he's been trying int."

oors and Glens, I believe, were his favourite subjects," said Mrs. "He seems to have been fond of Highland scenery, though Mrs. yfeather tells me he was never up there. We once played Aberdeen Inverness and saw just the same kind of scenery through the car- window, in the train, you know, not quite so brown perhaps and o many deers and stags about, but very like. You must admit, my they give the room a Tone. It's a relief to me after so many dars and photographs of Oddfellows and that class of thing. A an who's gone to so much expense and trouble with a Home so lets. Now where would you find a nicer room to sit in than this? matter of fact"—she dropped her voice—"I know they're still pay- ff on that chair you're sitting in and the oak table there and the ase behind you, she practically told me so, the other day. And you how Joe is set on having a Home of Our Own—well, put him in that chair, let him take a look round this room, and you can't drag away from the subject. 'Oh, for a Home of Our Own!' You sh hear him go on about it. Though I must say, things being as the and our work what it is, how we should get a Home of Our Own what we should do with it when we had got it, I *don't* know, and does, then he doesn't tell me. Men never *really* think at all, as find out for yourself one of these days, my dear."

"I've done all the finding out about them I'm going to do," announced very promptly.

"That I cannot believe," Mrs. Joe retorted, "or I should be sorr you. But you must agree with me that if you're lucky with room next best thing to having a Home is playing a resident season. we've been lucky with the rooms here, and this is practically a re season, isn't it?"

"Resident—with tram rides," replied Susie. "Though I usually g to Mundley by bus."

"With Tram Rides or Bus, certainly," said Mrs. Joe quite sole "But staying on in the same rooms makes it resident, I think, Though of course compared with a whole summer season at B mouth, this is nothing. When I heard of that offer," she conti more animated now, "the moment I heard of it, Susie, I said to Jo Luck has completely changed. We're Made.' And he agreed, t he says Bournemouth's not quite his style. Which is ridiculous of but you know how Joe will pretend to be so rough and ready. ' town,' I told him. 'A town with Tone and Taste—and Money of Five months at least guaranteed. It's a Miracle.' If you'd gone the coast and told me you were trying to find a place for a re season, I should have told you without the slightest hesitation—'B mouth, by all means,' I should have said at once. And Bourne now it is. But nothing so far seems to have been done about it, n I hope there's no haggling about terms. Now that we are getti we mustn't be greedy. Surely the Bournemouth people w haggle?"

"The terms are quite good," said Susie indifferently.

"Then they should be wired—at once."

Yes, I suppose so," Susie continued, staring into the fire. "I suppose ought to think ourselves lucky."

Undoubtedly. Remember Rawsley, where Miss Trant found us," l Mrs. Joe earnestly. "Bear that horrible place in mind, my dear."

I know. Only six months ago too. Oh, I've thought about all that."

ie shook herself out of the chair, leaned her elbows on the mantel- e, and tapped the fender with one foot. "Yes, it's a marvellous offer plum—the sort that C. P. people are always telling you they're get- g and somehow weren't able to accept—the liars! But—I feel a bit a pig about this—but"—she wheeled round swiftly, facing her com- ion—"oh, Mrs. Joe, I don't—I really, honestly don't—want to spend whole summer in C. P. work at Bournemouth ——"

ust what I said to Joe about you," the other cried in mournful mph. "'Susie doesn't want to,' I told him. I saw it at once. He n't of course, but then he never notices anything, never. Now why 't you? Tell me."

isie moved her shoulders impatiently and pouted down at the fire. erybody's beginning to tell me I'm restless, and it's true, I am. The ther, I suppose—bit of nerves—swelled head, if you like. I've had many good audiences this year, all of a sudden—not good for the girl. Now she doesn't know when she's well off." She laughed, er bitterly.

rs. Joe was maternal. "Now don't be foolish, Susie. Nobody is say- anything about you."

wouldn't care if they were," cried Susie wildly. "It isn't that. I ose I'm always thinking something absolutely marvellous is going urn up, and then when you all come along and say 'Hooray! Six ths in Bournemouth! Susie will continue to sing Number Twenty- n on the programme! Twice daily! Outside in the afternoon, but et in the shelter! Bring the children!' then I see the same old stick- e-mud business going on and on, and I think—oh hell!"

Not hell!" cried Mrs. Joe reproachfully.

es—*Hell!"* Susie repeated, ready now either to laugh or to cry. "I see myself stuck there. With those three numbers of Inigo's, I l go anywhere, anywhere. They're too good for concert party ences."

"Not too good," said Mrs. Joe, "but in a different style perhaps."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean too good really, but not what they wa Anyhow——" She stopped suddenly. "Oh, I am a fool. I'd forgott what I slipped in to tell you. About Coral Crawford. Now this is wh gets my goat, and you can't blame me. I brought the paper and put down somewhere. Here we are. Now," she went on sternly, "you member Coral Crawford, don't you? She was with the *Larks and O* Company with you, and left just after I joined, didn't she?"

"I should think I do remember her. Coral Crawford. One of t most outrageous Borrowers I ever shared a dressing-room with."

"Well then," cried Susie, "what did you think of her, honestly?"

Mrs. Joe replied as if she were giving a reference: "As a turn, ho less. As a companion, a fellow performer, a lady, no better, being dec ful, untrustworthy, given to lying, to say nothing of borrowing eve thing that could possibly be borrowed and some things that a s respecting girl would never dream of wanting from anybody else, a never returning anything without being asked times without numb She leaned back and added: "What about her?"

"You remember she said she was fed up with C. P. work and us to try and get into the chorus?" said Susie breathlessly. "She got I've never heard of her since—until this morning. Now read this." she stuck the folded newspaper under her companion's nose. "Starr —*starring,* mind you—in a new show at the Pall Mall! Doesn't it m you want to scream? Coral Crawford! Read it. Playing with Tom Mawson and Leslie Wate and Virginia Washington! Great succ Should run for ever! Look what they say about the show! Coral Cr ford! Bang at the top! I'm not jealous, honestly I'm not—it's seeing people you know getting there—but that girl—a star at the Mall already! Help! When I read that this morning in bed I c feel myself going hot and cold and pink and yellow all at once wanted to gnaw the sheets and blankets, I really did."

"Well, well!" Mrs. Joe still stared at the paper. "Of course the may have improved a lot since we knew her. I've known it happe the most surprising way," she said dubiously.

"Och—tripe! Not possible. Improved! She'd nothing to impr There wasn't anything there. Anyhow, there she is—Coral Crawfo 'rawly—at the Pall Mall, and here I am, taking the tram out to Mund- y every night to sing Number Thirty-three on the programme! Isn't enough to make you sick? And then you talk to me about six months Bournemouth, jogging on through the same old show! I know—I iow—I oughtn't to grumble—I'm *not* grumbling. Miss Trant's an gel—you're all angels—and I suppose I ought to shut up. But there u are. And *now* do you understand?"

"You think this isn't good enough for you?" said Mrs. Joe softly, star- g at the fire.

"I don't mean exactly that." Susie was penitent. "I don't, really."

"Yes, you do," the other replied, quite gently. Her hands were still w, resting idly on her knitting, that knitting which might go on and , from town to town, and be taken into dressing-rooms and railway riages and all manner of strange lodgings, and grow more and more nplicated and shapeless and useless until at last it would disappear d never be heard of again. "And you're right," she added, in quite a ferent tone of voice. "You are too good, Susie. I used to think I s." This was slipped in wistfully.

And so you are," said Susie stoutly. "Miles and miles."

Do you think so, really?" cried Mrs. Joe, brightening at once. "Well course when I'm in voice, there's no doubt I am. It's the delicacy of voice that kept me out of big work. And after all, good training l long experience, Taste and Interpretation—they must count for nething, mustn't they?"

Course they must, you absurd thing!"

What you want, what you're pining for, Susie, is a big Chance. it's why you're restless. I know, my dear. Well, keep on quietly, ng your best, and it'll come, that's what I say. I don't say *how* or *re* it'll come because I don't know, but come it will. I feel it. And 're still very young, aren't you?"

suppose so," said Susie gloomily, "though at times I feel a thou- l, I can tell you. And telling yourself how young you are doesn't n to make much difference if you're not satisfied. Every time I hear ut anybody in the profession suddenly doing so marvellously, like wly, I always try and find out their ages. So does Jerry, I discovered the other day. He's pretty poisonous, of course, but he does underst about things like that. Jerry'll get there soon, if it kills him."

"Your Chance might arrive," said Mrs. Joe, "at Bournemouth. T wouldn't surprise *me*."

"It would me. Unless you mean six nights at the local Picture Pal Bournemouth! Pooh!"

"Again, it might arrive here," Mrs. Joe went on impressively, "in C ford—or even Gort—I mean Stort, or Mundley. Yes, you can lau my dear, but I say it *might*. I've known it happen before and in worse places, far, far worse—in Sheer Holes."

"All right then, it might," said Susie in tones that suggested maximum of possible unbelief. "Let's talk about something a bit m cheerful or I shall weep. Would you like the latest about Elsie and Pink Egg?"

"Her what?" Mrs. Joe was startled.

"Well, he looks exactly like one. You've seen him, haven't you the great gentleman friend. She thinks about nothing else now. him every day, nearly. D'you know what she's gone and done?—bou a new winter coat—*now!* When he first popped up with his little she rushed off and bought a new jumper suit. You've seen it? W she tried going out with him in that and of course she was frozen every time, leaving her old coat at home. So the other day she ru round the shops and bought a new coat. And now she's so broke, b to the world, she'll never have a thing for summer. And all for Herbert—otherwise Bert—Dulver, otherwise Pink Egg."

"I wondered," mused Mrs. Joe. "That's why she's not bothering a future dates."

"Can't think of anything but Egg or Pink Un."

"It sounds to me like Touch-and-Go. She never had her heart in Profession. Do you think she'll manage it this time?"

"She hasn't said much," replied Susie, "but it looks to me as if hoping to bring him to the boil."

"He's no Egg, my dear, if she can't," said Mrs. Joe, majestically

"But what a life if she does!" cried Susie. "I ask you! Mrs. Egg! Just imagine—all your hopes on that! Horrors! I'd rather ı, going round to fifty Rawsleys, or having a resident season at Tew- rough ——”

Mrs. Joe shuddered. “Don’t mention that Hole, please, my dear. ven to joke about it.”

“Yes, at Tewborough with a sniffy cold that never stops than be like or Elsie. When I think of her Pink Egging it for all she’s worth, swear I won’t ever grumble or feel so restless again.”

“Very nice,” said Mrs. Joe, “but you will.”

And of course she did.

IV

one knew better than Miss Elsie Longstaff herself that, at that very ment, it was touch and go with the gentleman who has been some- at unfairly introduced to us as Pink Egg. Mr. Herbert Dulver was gentleman friend of some two years’ standing, though for the greater rt of that time he had occupied a lowly place in the hierarchy of Elsie’s ntlemen friends. Indeed, there had been periods when he had been completely out of mind as he was out of sight. Shortly after *The od Companions* had arrived at The Triangle, however, Mr. Dulver d turned up again, for he was managing an hotel owned by his father, substantial old place about fifteen miles out of Gatford and on the in London road. All the Dulvers—large, pink and brassily cheerful sons—were landlords or bookmakers or something convivial or sport- . Herbert had been managing an hotel at the seaside when Elsie d first made his acquaintance, and now, having acquired in a mysteri- s Dulverish manner a considerable sum of money, he proposed not y to manage but also to own another seaside hotel. He was a bachelor out forty who liked to clothe his pink plumpness in sporting tweeds, re a fair clipped moustache, and looked at the world out of prominent nt-blue eyes that had about them a kind of hard amiability. His nner and phraseology suggested the confidential, but his voice was d and carried far and he made full use of it, so that he always gave odd impression that he was bellowing out his innermost secrets. ually, however, he had no difficulty in keeping to himself whatever s best known only to himself, and was in reality a far more astute n of business than he appeared to be, like all the Dulvers, who for several generations now had been ordering drinks all round and slappi everybody on the back and talking at the top of their voices while t quietly contrived to feather their nests. And this Mr. Dulver had traditional attitude towards women. Outside business, in which he manded and took care to receive his money's worth, he was very chiv rous and gallant towards "the Ladies," and both masterful and sa with "the Girls." Elsie, who liked being one of the Ladies and one the Girls too, understood and appreciated both these attitudes, but t did not prevent her from telling herself from the first that Mr. Dul would want watching. Not that this stood in his way at all, for in heart of hearts Elsie admired a man who wanted watching.

Mr. Dulver had run her out in his little car to the hotel for lu and now they had stopped on the way back, at a spot on the side of road where a mound of hill and a little copse sheltered them from tearing wind. There they lit their cigarettes and Elsie waited ex tantly. She knew only too well that Mr. Dulver had news for her that this afternoon might decide everything. Miles of soft Midl landscape, brown fields, the glitter of water, the swirl of smoke, the distance, were spread before them, but she had no eyes for it all, the real world had narrowed to those few square inches, pinker t ever, that represented the outward map of Mr. Dulver's mind and w there might soon be seen the signals of victory or defeat.

"Well," she cried, turning to look him full in the face and pouti little, "aren't you going to tell me? I've been thinking about how were getting on down there all the week-end. Course, if you don't to tell, it doesn't matter. I just wondered, that's all." Elsie was cle for action. Every sentence now would be a well-aimed shot fro different turret.

"I was waiting," replied Mr. Dulver. "Didn't want to say anythi there. Between you and me, I'm thinking of taking it."

"You are?" she exclaimed in glad surprise, very much the br friendly, interested woman. "I'm glad, Bert; I really am." Were eyes shining, or were they just staring, bulging out, silly?

Bert looked pleased and important. "It's a good little house, tw bedrooms—might easily put in a few more, make an annexe, easy. smoke-room and bar trade too, though it wants working up a bit.

er's money for dust, of course, but fair number staying in winter, ecially week-ends. Golf, y'know, and fishing. Bang opposite the pier o——”

“Opposite the pier!” cried Elsie reproachfully. “Don't I know it is? aven't I played Eastbeach, year before last, and on that very pier? hat's the good of telling you anything, Bert? You never listen.” And e gave him a companionable tap.

“That's right,” he said apologetically. “I'm that full of it, I'm forget-g you've been there, Elsie. Well, they want four thousand, lock, ck, and barrel, except the usual take-overs. As I say, it wants work-g up, mind you.”

“You could do that all right,” she told him.

“I could eat it,” he proclaimed. “I tell you, I like the look of it, like town too. Not far from London, either. Good road. Run up now d again and see what's doing.” He clicked his tongue appreciatively d looked doggish.

“You would!” cried Elsie, who knew her cues. “You leave London ne. Time you behaved yourself, if you ask me.”

“Something in that,” he admitted, “though we've all got to have a o' fun, haven't we?”

“That's what I always tell them. We're a long time dead, I say.”

He looked at her admiringly and the arm resting on the back of the t behind her came a little closer. “You know what's what and you've n to Eastbeach,” he said. “Honestly now, what d'you think of it, ie?”

“You don't want to know what I think of it.”

Don't I? Well, what am I asking you for? Brought you out here hear what you think about it. Come on, Elsie, let's have it, straight m the horse's mouth.”

“Who you calling a horse!”

Not you.” The arm was resting on her shoulders now. The little ustache came nearer. There was a kind of mistiness about Mr. lver as he gazed at this fair ripeness, which was exactly his taste in ninine charm.

Elsie averted the kiss that she knew would inevitably have descended on her a moment later, but she did it easily and quietly by drawing away ever so little and suddenly looking serious, business-like. “We I'll tell you what I think about it, Bert, if you'll only be sensible for minute,” she began; and thereupon told him why she approved of Ea beach and the hotel there, showing him quite plainly, if he only h the sense to see it, that she was a girl with her wits about her who kn what the hotel business was, even if she did happen to be on the sta And all the time her imagination, dizzy as it was, still explored t possibility. She saw herself in that hotel, Mrs. Dulver, telling the mai what to do; queening it for half an hour now and again in the salo bar, hair always waved and good clothes; shopping in style—“Go morning, Madam”; recognised by all the gentlemen in the town—“Go afternoon, Mrs. Dulver”—raising their hats; having a word with t girls who came to the pier pavilion—not stand-offish or rubbing it in b still—pitying them; taking little trips to London with Bert in the c —a bigger one by this time; going round the shops and doing a sh —“used to be in the Profession myself, once, my dear”; the whole ri future. And a word or two could make it hers. “Of course you kn better than I do, Bert—a girl isn't much of a judge of these thin though I know a bit more than most—but that's my honest opini You go in and buy the place.”

“Going to,” said Mr. Dulver complacently. “Decided that first thi this morning, matter of fact, but just wanted to hear what you thou about it. And I'll tell you what it is, Elsie, old kid——”

“Old kid! What next!”

“You've got it where it's wanted,” he continued, tapping his forehe “Used to think you'd just got the looks and style and nothing else it——”

“Thank you, sir, she said,” cried Elsie. “Very good of you to adr the looks, I must say, *Mister* Dulver.” But she smiled at him v sweetly.

The arm tightened round her and the now amorous Bert tried to k her. To his surprise, however, for he had kissed her before, she repul him, firmly if gently. “Hello! Hel-low!” He drew back and look at her. “We aren't very matey today, are we? What have I d wrong?”

Knowing very well that the slightest chill would ruin all and

lising that now or never was the time when he must not have his
n way too easily, Elsie felt as if she was walking on a tight-rope. She
led again; a little one this time, a bit mysterious. “You never do
thing wrong, do you?” she remarked lightly. “But there isn’t any-
ng wrong. Honestly, there isn’t. I’m enjoying myself. Aren’t you?”
d she looked at him archly.

Not sure about that,” Mr. Dulver muttered, not so certain of himself
everything else as he had been a few minutes before. “Here,
ugh”—and the arm tightened again—“what about ——”

Going home?” she put in quickly. It was a terrible risk. If he said
nd she could almost hear him saying it already, in a flash—“All right,
go home then,” then it was all over. Awful!

’m going to say something to you,” said Bert, severely and impor-
ly. Bless him!—it didn’t matter now how severe and important he
d to sound. “Have you ever thought,” he continued with great
beration, “of abandoning your stage career? Wait a minute. I
n, to get married.”

Oh, I’ve been proposed to a good few times, I don’t mind telling you,”
d Elsie, who didn’t mind telling him.

No doubt. Suppose you were asked now, though?”

Depends on who did the asking.”

’m doing the asking.”

You try me.”

Go on then. What d’you say? Coming to Eastbeach as Mrs. Dulver
ne *Black Horse?*”

Oh, Bert ——! Are you sure ——?”

Shouldn’t be asking if I wasn’t.”

hen Mr. Dulver found himself being kissed. Into that kiss went a
le captured ecstatic vision of the future and a glorious farewell to
p lodgings, bad meals, old clothes, cramped dressing-rooms, bored
ences, and long Sundays in the train; and it took his breath away,
ost frightened him. But not for long. Bert was delighted. He may
e been a Dulver—with something hard, brassy, behind those curving
cheeks and prominent light-blue eyes—but nevertheless he was a
nber of the sentimental sex, and now he moaned over her like any
sick lad. He must be in the Eastbeach hotel before the season began,

and they must be married before he went to Eastbeach, even if it w be a rush. To all of this Elsie gave an instant and rapturous assent.

Then her mind went racing through all the possibilities and c plications. "But look here, Bert," she said, looking very solemn, "i going to be as soon as all that, it'll be awkward."

"Not it," he replied masterfully, holding her tight. "You leave me. I'll fix it. We're used to these things in the hotel business."

"That's all right, but"—she was genuinely troubled now—"well, nothing ready, and—oh, you might as well know—I'm completely br will be for weeks."

"Nothing in that. I knew you couldn't have much, from what said. I'll fix that too—stand all the exes. You tell me what you w Might as well do it properly while we're at it, what d'you say?"

What could she say—what were mere words—when she saw him s ing there like a god? But when the car was headed for Gatford ag she never stopped talking and he listened with a proud air of propri ship. At Mohen's, the large jewellers' in Victoria Street, he pulled saying "This is where you get the ring. Got to have a ring." Se that their marriage was to take place almost at once, other men m have thought an engagement ring unnecessary, but that was not Dulvers' way; what there was to be done had to be done—in s You never saw any Mrs. Dulver without her full complement of ri And Elsie, who was undoubtedly a born Mrs. Dulver, admired her all the more for this grand decision. "You'll have to come in," he her, "to see what you fancy and try 'em on."

"You go first, Bert," she replied. "Have a look round." She ha idea what he would care "to run to" in this matter of rings.

He disappeared into the shop, and she remained in the car f moment, then got out, looking at the passers-by with the assured of an engaged woman.

"Eh, I've been looking for you," said a familiar voice.

"Mr. Oakroyd!" She smiled upon him. She even smiled upon companion, a thick-set, bow-legged man, who wore an immense g cap.

"Ay," said Mr. Oakroyd. "Miss Trant wants you to bring that t red dress wi' thingumbobs on—you knaw which it is—round to t'the-ater tonight."

"All right," replied Elsie indifferently. She had almost forgotten the existence of Miss Trant, the dress, and the theatre. "You won't see me in that much longer, Mr. Oakroyd. I'm giving Miss Trant my notice tonight. I'm getting married—quite soon."

"Nay, you don't say!" cried Mr. Oakroyd. "Well, well! I did hear you were doing a bit o' courting in t'district. I've seen him, haven't I? It's t'chap as comes round for you, him i' t'light suits as keeps pub somewhere, isn't it?"

The chap himself put in an appearance at that very moment. "Bert," cried Elsie, "this is Mr. Oakroyd, our props man. I've just been telling him."

"Hope to see you at the wedding, Mr. Oakroyd, drinking our health," cried Mr. Dulver affably.

"Good enough! I'll be there," Mr. Oakroyd replied. "This a friend o' mine," he added, rather proudly, indicating the thick-set, bow-legged, green-capped one. "Mr. Jock Campbell."

"Hello! Know that name! Seen you before!" said Mr. Dulver, who was very much at home in a situation of this kind. "Saw you last Saturday."

"That's right," replied Mr. Oakroyd, who appeared to think it was his duty to answer for his friend, apparently a very taciturn man. "'Gainst Lincoln City here."

"And played a good game too. If the forwards had only been as good as you backs," Mr. Dulver observed, "the Triangle would have walked away with it. But your forward line's weak, in *my* opinion."

Mr. Campbell, after swaying uneasily, now cleared his throat, preparatory to bursting into speech. "Och!" he muttered, "they're raw."

"He means they're nobbut young lads, new to t'game," his interpreter explained. "Don't you, Jock?"

"That's about it," said Mr. Dulver heartily. "Well, pleased to have met you. Come in, Elsie. I bet you don't know what we're doing. Choosing the ring." And he burst into a loud guffaw, which was answered by companionable if faintly sardonic grins from Messrs. Oakroyd and Campbell, who both did something rather vague to their ca and then moved away.

When Mr. Oakroyd had discovered that he was lodging in the ve same street as, indeed, next door but one to, the famous Jock Cam bell, now left back and captain of the recently formed Triangle Unit A. F. C., and formerly of Glasgow Celtic, Sheffield Wednesday—ar Bruddersford United, he was very excited. Had he not spent many ar many a happy Saturday afternoon at the Bruddersford ground cheerir Jock's vast and miraculous clearance kicks? But when he also di covered that the great man was not only close at hand but was qui ready to make the acquaintance of an old admirer, to smoke a pipe wi him and take turns about at paying for half-pints, Mr. Oakroyd's excit ment and gratification knew no bounds. Jock was forty now, and so veteran, an ancient of days, among professional footballers; on the fie he looked old, if only because he had met so many footballs with h head that he was almost completely bald in front; he was heavy and h was slow; but he was an unusually powerful man and his long exper ence, his guile, enabled him to play a good game even yet, so that thoug his best days, when fifty thousand spectators roared their approval him, were over long ago, he was still an acquisition to such a juni club as the Triangle United. He had not been at Gatford long an was not a man to make friends easily, and it was not really surprisin that he should take pleasure in Mr. Oakroyd's company. They had common theme in Bruddersford, where Jock had lived several year they were both separated from their wives; and they both had a decid taste for football and tobacco and beer and a deep philosophical intere in the chances and changes of this life, though the older of the two, M Oakroyd, was the more eager and romantic. Such idealism as Mr. Cam bell had centred about public houses: his one ambition now was to d what so many of his successful fellow gladiators had done, to find nice little public house, not too far from a football ground, and tur himself into the landlord of it. A good benefit match might do it. Fo the rest, he was a man of vast but comfortable silences. Mr. Oakroy as we know, could hardly be called loquacious, but compared with hi new friend he was a chatterbox.

“Yon's pleased wi' hersen nar,” Mr. Oakroyd shouted, as they co ued their walk down Victoria Street. He had to shout because the ind was making such a din. "She's bin fair sick to get hersen off is long time—and nar she's gone an' roped him in. An' it'll just suit r lahdidahing it a bit i' t'saloon bar wi' all her best clothes on and her ir all frizzed up."

"Ay," said Mr. Campbell.

"Not a bad sort o' chap she's gotten hold of," Mr. Oakroyd continued. ight landlord style, did you notice?"

"Ay," said Mr. Campbell. And then, two minutes afterwards he mut-red something that Mr. Oakroyd, who was now very clever at this nd of thing, interpreted to mean that, in Mr. Campbell's opinion, Mr. ulver was obviously in a big way of business and was not a man to rve pints himself.

They turned out of the main street into a quieter thoroughfare. Here r. Oakroyd chuckled. "Pink Egg! That's what Soosie—young lass troupe—calls him," he explained, "and if you nobbut tak a good look him he's a bit like one, more still wi' his 'at off. Pink Egg! Eh, e's droll."

This shocked Mr. Campbell into speech. "It's no name that, man, to a landlord in a big way o' business," he said solemnly.

Mr. Oakroyd, well acquainted with his companion's great desire and specting such an ambition, one for heroes, made no reply, and they vered the next two hundred yards or so in silence.

"Hoo's the lass that's awa'?" Mr. Campbell suddenly enquired. He d heard all about Lily in Canada.

"Nay, I haven't heard for a bit, not sin' I were telling yer," replied r. Oakroyd. "Seemingly she's doing champion. Allus says so. But like to see for mysen," he added, a trifle wistfully.

"Ay," said Mr. Campbell. And then, growing reckless as a conver-ionalist, he said: "An' the wife? Hoo's she?"

"I can't get to know owt. Neither she nor t'lad'll say. I wrote nobbut ther day an' asked 'em right aht if she were poorly an' if I could do t. Eh, it's damn silly going on like that! But it's my wife all ower."

"They gae their ain gate," Mr. Campbell brought out from the depths his own experience.

Nothing more was said until they reached Crimean Road, where they both lodged, and then Mr. Oakroyd, who had been looking vagu troubled, returned to the subject of Elsie and her marriage. "That's going o' t'owd lot," he said, as if *The Good Companions* had been gether for six years instead of six months. "Nar it's started, mark word. Elsie's nobbut t'first. More to foller, or I'm a Dutchman! H pen you've noticed it yersen, Jock? Nowt changes at all for some ti and then—all of a sudden, afore you knaw where you are—they're goi right and left, and it's all to bits."

"Maybe," Mr. Campbell ventured.

"I'm down o' this, I am an' all," Mr. Oakroyd went on. "I mun h what t'others has to say. There's been a summat i' t'air these two-th week."

"Ay, a sicht too much wind," replied Mr. Campbell gravely. And will allow him to have the last word—for once in his life.

Chapter Two

A CHAPTER OF ENCOUNTERS

I

ELSIE finished with the show on the last Saturday at Mundley, when she had been given a most successful Benefit Night, concluding h genuine tears and bouquets. Jimmy had already slipped down to mingham to interview and book her successor, Miss Mamie Potter. is first week of their return to the Gatford Hippodrome was going e exciting. The new soubrette was due to arrive on Monday morn-, to rehearse in the afternoon, to appear at night. Then on Wednes- there was Elsie's wedding, which was to be celebrated out at the lvers' hotel on the London Road. They were all going and the bus already been ordered. Then on Saturday there was to be another nd Benefit Night—you could see the bills plastered all over the town is time for Miss Susie Dean, our popular comedienne. Next Satur- was Susie's twenty-first birthday. And she was giving a tea party , and there was to be some sort of jollification, only vaguely out- d as yet, after the show. Moreover, the Hippodrome would be ked out every night, as they all knew, with enthusiastic Gatfordians. e was excitement enough for hard-working professionals. What a k!

et all was not well with them. The older members of the troupe, my and Mitcham and the Brundits, were still quietly in despair ut the Bournemouth offer, not yet accepted. Miss Trant seemed so my and remote these days that she was considered unapproachable the time being. It was very odd, but there it was. Business was r better, and, on the other hand, nothing bolder had been attempted years in the C. P. world than Miss Trant's present venture, the rent- of the Hippodrome, on stiff terms, with some nasty clauses slipped and yet—so fantastic is the sex, as Jimmy and Mr. Mitcham pointed out to one another—she did not seem to be bothering her head abou at all. But then all the young people were rather queer. Jerry Jerni ham was more aloof and mysterious than usual, and was thought to up to something, though nobody knew what. In spite of birthday a benefit—or because of them—Susie was still restless, rather snappy times, and given to wriggling her pretty shoulders at people who as the simplest and friendliest questions. She had snubbed poor Inigo often lately that now he kept out of her way, stalked about with a n and purposeful air, and was understood to be hard at work revising eight numbers he had written for them, which he called his *Tripe à mode de Jazz*—to the entire mystification of his friend, Mr. Oakro Success had come at last, but all these young people seemed to be tak it the wrong way, which proved conclusively to Mr. Mitcham that yo people were not what they were when he had been a young pers

Mr. Oakroyd was mystified by many things these days. He was interested as any of the others in the events of the near future. In own fashion he shared any excitement that was going. Nevertheless, found himself brooding somewhat darkly on Canada and 51, Og Street and the destiny of *The Good Companions*. He had never b very fond of Elsie, but she was "one o' t'owd lot," and the fact that was going and another taking her place troubled him more than it any of the others. Perhaps he alone, from out of the depths of philosophy of Sudden Change, felt that this coming week would t them all much further than they ever imagined, that the exciting pl they had made for it were nothing compared with some other pl already being laid down for them by the old powers, the conspiracy the wind and the stars. The thread we saw dangling before him—long ago, it seems!—as he walked up Manchester Road, Bruddersf after the match, that thread, its colour changing, deepening, is now r ning faster and faster; and perhaps he has heard—in a dream, thro some *Old Salt* reverie—the rattle of its winding spool.

The first thing that happened, of course, was Miss Mamie Po Jimmy had said that she was young but experienced, had no voice speak of but danced really well, and would do. When pressed m closely, he always pointed out that people who were in a hurry co not pick and choose as long as they liked, and that for his part he pretend to be able to work miracles. There was thought to be some- g queer, fishy, about this. The arrival, the rehearsal, the appearance he stage, of Miss Potter soon settled the question. Jimmy had no l solid reason for not engaging her, and so he had engaged her, but e instinct must have warned him that all was not well. On the stage was adequate enough; as a matter of fact she was better than Elsie ever been. But off the stage, Miss Mamie Potter was insufferable. in less than twelve hours of her first arrival at Gatford station, she put all their backs up; and it was clear that she was indeed a born r-up of backs.

ss Potter had a sleek, almost electro-plated, blonde head; no eye- s; very round blue eyes; a button of a nose, so small and heavily lered that it resembled the chalked end of a billiard cue; and a h that was a perpetual crimson circle of faint astonishment. The r half of her, her neck and shoulders and the thin arms ending so usly in little dumpy hands, was poor; but her legs were really beau- It was as if she were being carried about by two fine sonnets. e two exquisite, twinkling, silky calves of hers seemed to be always ng charmingly witty and impudent comments on the world. If ad never done anything but walk a little way in front of depressed , she would have been a notable public benefactor, distributing a of the joy of life. Unfortunately, she talked; and she talked in a of idle, staring voice, and the result was havoc. Her perpetual ng "I say" was very soon a storm signal.

say," she said to Mr. Oakroyd, after she had known him about er of an hour, "you seem to get a lot of your own way here, don't You're only the props, aren't you?" Mr. Oakroyd regarded her astonishment and rubbed his chin hard. "Ay, that's all," he replied . "Nobbut a sort o' dog like. Just let me knaw if you hear me ing out o' my turn. You mun just set us right as you go on. We nowt." This speech might have puzzled and possibly quietened people, but Miss Potter merely gave it a little condescending nod hen strolled away. "I say," she said to the horrified Morton am, "some of those card tricks of yours are pretty ancient, aren't " Equally ancient, in her opinion, were Jimmy's gags and Mrs. allads. "I say," she remarked to Susie, "you seem to go down here very well, but they're letting you dig an awfully big hole in the gramme, aren't they?" This was after the show on Monday nigh had been a rather queer performance. The house was crowded a generally enthusiastic as ever, but from somewhere at the back o pit (which was the cheapest part of the house, there being no g at the Hippodrome) there had come, at odd times, various loud and hootings and cat-calls, obviously resented by most people i audience, though now and then raising a laugh. This had never pened before, and they were all talking about it after the show. furious Susie told Mrs. Joe that it must be Mamie Potter, but thi not satisfy Mrs. Joe or anybody else, not even Susie herself.

On Tuesday morning, the wind had dropped to a mild breeze little watery sunshine crept over the Midlands. Miss Trant, sti settled by her visit to Hitherton, still haunted by the daffodils an bursting crocuses of the Cottage garden, decided that she must some light and air, and so took Susie and some sandwiches for in the car.

"It's heavenly to see the country again," cried Miss Trant, whe had left the car factories and the Triangle trams a long way behin wish you could stay with me at Hitherton, some time, Susie. D think you would like the country?"

"Oh, I adore the country," cried Susie in her turn. She had ima herself saying that, more than once, in interviews. She asked for ing better, she always told the imaginary journalist, a young man nice, very respectful, than to retire to her little country place— cottage where she could do everything for herself (see photog But what she did not know, that morning, was that very soon, s than she expected, she really would be giving those interviews. never seen enough of it," she went on, "because I've spent nearly bit of my time in towns—usually awful holes. If the country onl theatres and shops and people, it would be perfect, wouldn't it?"

Miss Trant laughed, then took the car into the side of the roa stopped. "We can eat our sandwiches here, don't you think?"

Susie sniffed the air appreciatively. "It feels quite strong, doesn —the air, I mean. It's so funny not to get it second-hand, used up I've been brought up on that kind, and this sort makes me feel ght. Really, it does. I want to giggle." She skipped out of the car d pirouetted a little on the shining grass. Then she looked down rue-lly. "Jolly wet, though. That's the nuisance about the country, ough, isn't it? It's so wet and muddy. When it does dry up, it sud-nly gets dusty then, and if you go a walk you're absolutely choked d too thirsty to speak and your shoes are too tight all of a sudden."

They ate sandwiches. "I wonder what the very superior Miss Potter inks about us all this morning," Miss Trant remarked. "You don't e her, do you?"

"Like her!" cried Susie. "She made me feel like murder last night. e did everybody. And as for thinking this morning, she won't have rted yet. I know. She'll be just getting up now, wiping the cold eam off her face. Honestly, she's poisonous. She'll have us all quar-ling like mad within a week. They always do, that kind. You just tch. Jimmy ought to have known, even if he was in a hurry and she unded all right. A woman would have spotted what she was right ."

"Perhaps she'll improve in a day or two," said Miss Trant, rather lifferently. "I must admit she was rather terrible yesterday."

"Did she say anything to you?" Susie enquired. "I'll bet she did."

"Oh yes. I wasn't left out, I assure you, Susie. She strolled up to e and said: 'I say, I don't quite see why you're doing this, you know. is isn't your line at all, is it?'"

"She would! The cheek! How that girl's come to live so long beats ." Having relieved her feelings, Susie grew thoughtful, stole a glance two at her companion, then said, finally: "But it isn't your line, is it?"

"I never said it was," Miss Trant replied.

"No, of course not," Susie went on. "Don't think I'm going to be eeky now. Or if you do, stop me. And I can promise you now that n not going to say a word about Bournemouth, not going to mention e place."

"Thank you, my dear," said Miss Trant demurely. "As a matter of t, the others haven't mentioned it lately——"

"No, they just look it now," cried Susie. "I've noticed them. Their es go rolling 'Bournemouth' at you. Honestly, don't they? I noticed e—poor darling!—yesterday staring at you, like a sick cow, and I really thought something was the matter with him until it dawned on me was trying to stare you into telling him something about the Bou mouth offer. But what I was going to say was this—Aren't you re getting a bit tired of us?"

"Gracious, no!"

"Honestly now?"

"Not a bit. I won't include Miss Mamie Potter——"

"Gosh! I should think not."

"But I assure you I'm not in the least tired of the rest of you, of t party. I'm like you, Susie. I'm feeling restless, not knowing wha want to do but only knowing what I don't want to do. The thought our spending a whole summer on the South Coast somehow doe attract me at all."

"I know. But what does attract you?"

"I haven't the least idea," Miss Trant replied, as lightly as possi though it was quite obvious she was in earnest.

"That's me all over—up to a point," Susie remarked. "I do kn what I want, though—and a fine fat chance I've got of getting it! Ir *annoys* me. Doesn't he you?"

"No. Why should he?" Miss Trant was amused.

"Don't laugh; it's serious. Well, he could *do* something, and he j doesn't. He's so *feeble*—just the amah-teurrr, you know, ab-so-lutel Here Susie gave a vindictive imitation of Inigo's careless tones. "Wh he follows me round, looking like a dying duck—and yet won't *do* a thing—and is so high-and-mighty about the bits of things he writes papers—though no paper will ever have them—and won't bother ab his songs, though they might get him anywhere—oh, I could beat hi I really could! And then if I say something nasty to him, instead answering back or putting his tongue out or giving me a good sh ing——"

"Which I'm sure you've deserved," Miss Trant put in.

"He just looks at me—like the Norphan Child—and walks away, a then stays away, sulking. He makes me furious. Not that it rea matters, of course, what he does. But just now, when I'm dying fo chance myself, it's enough to make me sick to see somebody who ha ıce not doing anything. So that's that. And now you can laugh, ɔu like. Let's go, shall we?"

n the way back a curious thing happened. The side-road they were oined the main road about ten miles out of Gatford, and it chanced t when they arrived at the turning the traffic on the main road, con- ing for the most part of new cars from Gatford, was thicker than al, so that they pulled up for a minute or two. Miss Trant was idly tching the procession of cars when suddenly she stared intently and e a little gasp. The next moment she was standing up trying to ain a last glimpse of a car that had gone past them, there on the main d, and in the opposite direction from Gatford. The moment after was sitting down again, still wide-eyed and a trifle pale.

Vhat's the matter?" cried Susie.

thought I saw some one I know—or used to know," Miss Trant lied shakily.

usie looked at her. Then she burst out in triumph: "It's that man once told me about, isn't it? Doctor McIntyre or whatever his name The one on the boat."

Doctor McFarlane. Yes, I thought it was. But it was all so quick. ıdes—oh, it's absurd!"

Why is it absurd? I don't see it. Couldn't he be here as well as where else? Haven't you ever tried to find out where he is?"

No, I haven't," Miss Trant replied, not very firmly. "Why should I?"

Why should you!" Susie was both sympathetic and derisive. "If vas me, I should know all about him. Doctors ought to be easy to l. Wouldn't it be marvellous if you didn't feel well and sent for a tor, and then *he* came and said: *'What, you!'* You don't know. He have been in Gatford or Mundley or Stort or somewhere round all the time. Let's get back at once and find out. If you don't, ill."

was useless for Miss Trant to protest, and indeed she did not protest much. Once back in Gatford, Susie made for the nearest telephone ctory and was so excited that she could hardly turn the pages. Susie always wildly romantic on other people's behalf, and is to this day. no Dr. Hugh McFarlane was to be found in the telephone directory, ch cast a wide net in the district. This was rather a blow for Susie, but she was not daunted. She pestered Miss Trant until that em rassed lady was compelled to admit there was such a thing as a Me Directory, where any doctor might be found. She was also comp to admit that she had never examined one. "And how you cou beats me," cried Susie. "It's no use you saying you don't want to k because you do."

"But it's all so ridiculous," the other protested. "I haven't seen hi years. He's probably forgotten my existence."

"And probably not," Susie told her. "The sort of man you'd probably wouldn't, though I must say I wouldn't give most me months. I believe," she added shrewdly and boldly, "you're fright I'm being really cheeky now, I know, but it's because I'm so fon you. And I hate to think of you just looking after us and then si alone reading about the three musketeers or Robin Hood or wha it is you do read about, when there may be somewhere round the co a marvellous Scotch doctor who"—and here Susie became very dra —"when he comes back to his lonely house, late at night, after perf ing all sorts of operations—and 'Bless you, doc!' the poor people s I got that from a film—sits in his chair and smokes a pipe and thin you—and already his hair is turning grey at the temples——"

"Oh, do be quiet, Susie," cried Miss Trant, crimson, half laug half angry. "I shall really be cross if you don't."

"All right then, I will," said Susie, preparing to depart. They at Miss Trant's hotel now. "But I shall go round to the Free Li and see if they've got that book with all the doctors in. You can't me doing that. Good-bye."

And about three-quarters of an hour later, Miss Trant was call the telephone. It was Susie. "I daren't come round, and I cou wait," said Susie. "I looked at that book. It's stiff with McFarl They must all be doctors. Honestly, dozens of 'em. I'm not whether I found the right one."

"He was born in 1885 and went to Edinburgh," Miss Trant tol receiver, and then heard a little laugh come floating back to her.

"Well, anyhow he isn't here. Isn't it a shame? I got it dow three—and they were all miles off—one in India and another in deen—and I think the other was in London. I asked the Library m book wasn't out of date—and he got quite annoyed—but when he ied down a bit, he admitted that lots of the doctors could have ed since it came out. And he's seen our show—and he recognised after a bit and was quite sweet. So I think it probably was him, t you?"

No, I don't," said Miss Trant. "It couldn't have been. You shouldn't e bothered. It's all—nothing."

nd when she returned to her room, she reminded herself that it was nothing. It is not much fun being so intimately concerned with ing. The thought of it can even rob you of your legitimate pleasure good historical novel. Louis the Eleventh of France and the Duke urgundy made a poor show of capturing Miss Trant's interest for rest of that afternoon. One sneered, the other stormed, but all in —poor shadows!

II

next day, Elsie became a Dulver. From all parts of the country e came Dulvers to welcome her, the males all large, shining, pink, se, and brassily convivial, the females all large, blonde, and elaboy coiffured and upholstered. It is difficult to imagine what the vers would have made of a christening or a funeral, because it is cult to imagine a Dulver either coming into this world or going out ; but there could be no doubt they were designed by Nature to rate weddings. The customary festivities, all the eating and drinkthe healths and back-slappings, sledge-hammer compliments and ghty jokes, might have been invented for them. Elsie was inspected ll manner of Dulverish relatives, who looked as if they were quite ble of having her stripped and weighed, and of pinching her in dry places to make sure she was a sound article. After being thus ected, she was approved. The general opinion obviously was that, her shape, colouring and disposition, it was only a matter of time th some further coiffuring, upholstering, and the sipping of small s—before she became a very good specimen of the female Dulver, o queen it in any hotel. And Bert was proud of her. Bert's father mother, two fine heavy Dulvers, were proud of Bert. All the relawere proud of somebody or something, if only of their appetites—

"I'm sixty past," one gigantic purple Dulver told everybody, " can eat and drink with the best yet." Thus they were all happy

Mr. Dulver senior, in the business himself and now the host many professionally convivial persons, had no alternative, coul have found one even if he had looked for it: the thing had to be in style. The style he had chosen he called "the slap-up," but it also be described as the Late Roman, so great was the crowd of so lavish the feast. The immense wedding breakfast that awaited in the long room upstairs drew a tribute even from the old master purple Dulvers. Mr. Oakroyd, who was there with the rest of *The Companions,* told his friend Mr. Jock Campbell, that the comm travellers of Bruddersford, a body of men famous for their m feasts, had never done better than this. "That'll be champagne i' gurt bottles, eh?" he whispered. Mr. Campbell replied indifferentl it was, and that in his opinion champagne was poor stuff. "Tak o' the whisky, man," he added. "If a few o' them gaes in for the an' sweet drinks, it'll work oot tae a bo'le o' whisky a man. An started on it, juist wetted ma lips, I couldna run the length o' the way line Saturday." Mr. Campbell did not sigh because he wa given to sighing, but he shook his head and looked as wistful as possible for a thirteen-stone full-back to look, as he thought wh might have done with all that good whisky if there had been no ball field waiting for him on Saturday. But he was gravely happy in the presence of so many landlords in a big way. He had been gr as an old acquaintance by many of the sporting Dulvers.

Miss Trant met some old acquaintances too. At first she was dazed among all this hand-shaking, back-slapping, guffawing, ro press of people, and after she had shaken hands with the ecstatic and her Bert, before the wedding breakfast began, she retired i corner and found herself wishing it was all over. The Dulvers too large and loud for her, though she could not help being amus them, for they were all so like one another and so unlike any set of people she had ever known.

"Now you're Miss Trant, aren't you? That's right, that's rig

This came, in a thick, husky voice, from a stout elderly man, now stood before her with his head cocked on one side. "And

’t remember me, do you? Knew you right across the room. Couldn’t
the name at first—got the face all right, not the name—then it come
k. Now stop a bit and think. Take your time. Remember me?”
ne had seen that prominent, reddish nose, that damp forehead, those
humourous eyes, somewhere before. He had not looked so clean
n. Sheffield. That funny little house. It was Elsie’s uncle, the
nbone player. Unkerlarthur, they had called him. She told him so.
That’s right. You’ve got it,” he said, shaking hands. “I’ve heard
about you, through our Elsie. She doesn’t write to me, you know,
our Effie hears from her regular, and she passes it on to me—some
t, anyhow. Been good to our Elsie, you have, Miss Trant. Oh, I
w! Well, she’s a good girl, isn’t she?—I mean, fairly speaking and
ng her all round, she *is* a good girl, isn’t she? And”—here he be-
e very confidential—“she’s done well for herself, hasn’t she? He’s
ce feller.”

iss Trant agreed that he was, and said they both seemed very happy.
nkerlarthur came nearer and was so confidential that his mouth
ned to slip round to the right side of his face and stay there. “They
to me this morning, both of ’em, ‘Any time you want a holiday,
blow by the briny, you come and stay with us at where’s it—
beach.’ Well, I shan’t go, ’cos when people get you there, they find
don’t wancher. ‘What’s he come for?’ they say. But I like to be
d, don’t you? Course if it’s something extra special, like this, I’d
Only got here just in time this morning. I was playing at the
tre last night, and had to be up at five this morning to get here at
Got a substitute for tonight—and God help ’em when he starts.
s got a note like riving oilcloth. Our Effie’s here. Have you seen
”

iss Trant had hardly time to say she had not, before Unkerlarthur
d into the throng and reappeared in about two minutes, dragging
with him. Effie, looking like a larger and coarser edition of Elsie,
ost hurled herself at Miss Trant, into whose mind there came leap-
the oddest recollections of the hotel on the road from Derby, the Tip-
ds, and the queer evening in Sheffield.

Well, I don’t know!” screamed Effie, who was obviously in the high-
spirits. “Fancy us meeting like this! Of course I knew we should,

And aren't you looking well! Ten years younger, honest. I h knew you. How d'you think I'm looking?"

"Very well indeed," said Miss Trant, who had just come to the clusion that Effie resembled nothing so much as a tropical sunset ac panied by rumours of earthquake. "You're a little thinner perhap

"Think I am!" cried Effie triumphantly. "Nearly a stone down, w is more than our Elsie can say. Now you've put a bit on, I should but then you could stand it, couldn't you? Theatricals suit you, Trant, my word they do, the way you've come on this winter. Rem ber when I asked you to take some things to our Elsie? That st it, didn't it? If it hadn't been for that, you wouldn't be here, and wouldn't be here, and I shouldn't be here, not really, you know, if think about it." And Effie rattled on in this strain for another minutes, after which she rushed away and joined some male Dul

"By her palaver," Unkerlarthur observed sardonically, "anyb think she was three brides rolled into one 'stead of the bride's s I always knew our Elsie'd go first. I'd have laid five to one on it. Effie tries too hard, that's what's matter with her. You've got to let think it's their ideear, haven't you?—the fellers, I mean. But soo our Effie meets 'em, she lets 'em hear the wedding bells—an' they like it, you know—it has to come gradual. This'll go to our E head properly, this will. There'll be some trade on with her She'll never rest till she's got hold o' some poor chap."

"Miss Trant!"

The voice was familiar. At first it did not seem to come from where in particular, but after a moment or two, during which t was quite a commotion in that corner of the room, and large Du appeared to be hurled right and left by some invisible force, t emerged from the crowd, shaken, gasping, but triumphant, little Thong.

"Now isn't this a surprise?" she cried, so excited that she could h get the words out of her mouth.

"Take it easy," Unkerlarthur put in severely.

"I should think it is," said Miss Trant, smiling. "And a very nice too. I'm so glad to see you again."

"There now!" cried Miss Thong, as if to some unseen audience een waiting for this moment. "But I said to Elsie, in a letter of e, after she wrote to me and gave me the wonderful news and said ry and come,' I said to her, 'Well, if I *can* manage it—and that depend on the work and Pa, but chiefly Pa—but if I can,' I said r, 'don't tell Miss Trant and then it'll be such a surprise.' But I thought to myself, 'Oh, she won't remember you, you silly little , seeing all the people she does and going from place to place all me, fresh faces everywhere.' But you did, didn't you?"

ecognised your voice before I actually saw you," Miss Trant told

d you really? Well, but you see, I saw you and called out and couldn't get to you and had to push a bit."

aw you knocking 'em about," said Unkerlarthur solemnly.

is is Elsie's ——" Miss Trant began.

kerlarthur held up his hand. "We've been interjooced, Miss Thong ne. Haven't we?"

rlier this morning," cried Miss Thong. "And a treat it was too, elling me all about the theater. I had to push because everybody such a size, aren't they? I thought I was going to be lost and they'd have to put a notice up: 'Lost—Miss Thong. Finder Re-d.'" She laughed, coughed, and laughed again. "But did you ee so many enormous people? I never did."

at's 'cos they're all in the public line o' business," Unkerlarthur ned. "They may not take a lot themselves—some of 'em'll hardly it—but the smell does it. Then some of 'em's bookies, and they've be fat—nobody'd never give nothing to a thin un."

ould you believe it!" cried Miss Thong. "But they're all nice, they? One or two of them have spoken very nicely to me, al-h they don't know who or what I am, and when I came I never ed to be noticed. 'Just let me see it,' I told Elsie. And now I se it's nearly time to begin eating all this, though how anybody— don't care how big they are—will ever get through a quarter of an't think."

hall do my share," said Unkerlarthur sturdily. "I'm peckish."

I get a mouthful down," Miss Thong gasped, "I shall be lucky, at excited and silly. You know me of old, don't you, Miss Trant?

Always the same with me. I go on and go on, sitting in my little —you remember it, don't you, Miss Trant?—they're building now w they kept the hens, though it's not spoiling the view—and there I doing my work, seeing nobody but customers coming in—and I course—unless there's something special on at the chapel. And t she continued, after gasping for breath, "when something does ha I'm all upset—just excitement and silliness, that's all. 'Oh, stop it, silly little thing,' I say to myself many a time, and I could shake m sometimes, I could really, though that wouldn't make it any b would it?"

"Worse," Unkerlarthur told her, "make it worse. What you to do is to take it easy. What's the matter with you is temperament, what it is. Our family's been just the same, except me. And th men playing in bands now—men I've known, men I've played I could give you their names—and they won't take it easy. T rehearse all right—oh yes—quite all right. When it comes to the r all of a dither. What happens? Say a wrong sheet o' music is sli in—a wrong sheet, that's all." He looked sternly down at Miss T

"Well, fancy!" said Miss Thong, who evidently felt that some was expected of her.

"It's a thing," said Unkerlarthur, still looking stern, "that ha many a time. Where are they? These fellers that won't take it I mean. Where are they? They're lost, finished—can't find the sheet—can't pick up the cues—and bang goes the part! And al they won't take it easy."

"So there you are, Miss Thong," said Miss Trant, smiling at h

But Miss Thong did not stand rebuked. "You've no idea," sh them both, "what a treat it is to me to hear all these things abou theatre. And then seeing you all too, close to!"

"They're sitting down," said Unkerlarthur, who promptly pre to sit down himself.

"You must sit next to me," said Miss Trant, "unless you've arr to sit somewhere."

"D'you think I could? Don't you think they'd mind?" Miss Th long witchlike nose flushed with pleasure. "If I got between tw

: big ones, they'd only see the top of my head, wouldn't they? Do think they'd mind if we sat here?"

Miss Trant and Miss Thong sat together, and the latter chattered, ed, ate, drank, coughed, and laughed so much that it was a wonder did not shake what remained of her entirely to pieces. *The Good panions* were scattered round both sides of the long table. Mr. royd sat with his friend, Mr. Campbell, who was now looking very , as if something very strange might suddenly pop out of the great pie just in front of him. Mrs. Joe was very stately, and looked flanked as she was by two reddish shining Dulvers. The tall figure r. Morton Mitcham was to be seen at one end of the table, among mportant people. Two young female Dulvers, all gold and pink, attending to Jerry Jerningham, whose accent was now so fantastic many of the older guests were under the impression he was a forer. Inigo had tried hard to find a place by the side of his adored , having had quite enough of the barren policy of pretending to l her; but he had not been successful. A very dashing young er had carried her off and safely wedged her between his attentive and the gigantic purple Dulver. This fellow had been hanging d her ever since they arrived, and Susie did not seem to mind at all. ed, she seemed to like his society—a fellow of a type that Inigo always detested—a loud, brainless, teethy, pink ass, absolutely. It incredible that Susie could be amused for more than five minutes ich a grinning idiot. If she was not pretending, he concluded, then must be a vulgar streak in her somewhere. Impossible that a man l be really in love with a girl if he could think about vulgar streaks is way. If he could only hold on to that vulgar streak, he would feel wonderfully detached. Meanwhile, he would show her that it ot matter to him if she spent her time giggling with fifty appalling g Dulvers.

some reason, which Mrs. Joe and Susie said was known only to eity, Miss Mamie Potter had been invited. Miss Potter was there go's elbow, and was only too pleased to keep him company throughhe feast. He did not dislike Miss Potter as heartily as most of the s did, but he had no great opinion of her and he could not underwhy she seemed so anxious for his company. There were plenty

of young Dulvers there eager to wait upon her, and why she s
prefer him, as she so obviously did, was a mystery. But for th
day or two she had been very gracious to him. It was very odd.
ever, there it was, and now he tried hard to amuse her and to lo
if he had no other object in life than to keep her amused. Miss
did not exactly smile upon his efforts because she hardly ever s
her features were so circular that smiling was difficult; but at lea
contrived to modify that insufferable look of faint astonishment
she glanced his way. She also contrived, while appearing to tast
or two things merely for appearance sake, to put away a good d
food and several large glasses of the sweet champagne.

When they had all finished eating, the gigantic purple Dulver
denly arose and held up his glass. "Now then, ladies and genel
he boomed, "I give you the 'appy pair. May they never regret thi
I've regretted mine sometimes." Laughter, and a cry of "Now
Walter!" from an equally gigantic and almost as purple female.
so has the wife, though from what she just shouted at me, you mi
think it. 'Owever, that's always blown over. When I 'ave regrett
ladies and genelmen, I've always found afterwards I was a bit belo
at the time." Laughter and applause. "It was a 'appy day for me,
if you ask me, this will be a 'appy day for Bert. Until today, Mrs.
was a stranger to most of us, but we can see by the look of her
going to make him 'appy. And if she hasn't got a good husband,
I don't know where you're going to find 'em, that's all I have t
Here's the best to 'em both." And the toast was drunk with enthus

Bert, called upon to reply, said that he had nothing to say, a
rights shouldn't be there at all. He was a married man now, an
haps the less he said the better. (Cries of "Shame!" and "Quite rig
But he would just like to say this. He had not always been lucky
ing out winners. (Laughter, and "What about *Sporty Boy?*" fro
dashing young Dulver who had attached himself to Susie.) Bu
time he was sure he had got a winner all right. (Applause, and "
put your shirt on it, my boy," from the purple Dulver, followe
screams of expostulation and laughter from the ladies.) And they
he hoped, they were all welcome to come and have a look at them
at Eastbeach.

was evidently felt by the company that it was time now for some- / belonging to the bride's party to make a speech. As Unkerlarthur the only male relative, people looked at him, and after pretending 1 minute or two that he had not seen them, Unkerlarthur was com- d to struggle to his feet and address the company. "Well, I don't w," he remarked, feeling the end of his nose as if he were not sure as still there. "This is right out o' my line. I might play a bit of I'd the old trombone here. Anyhow, I'm only the bride's uncle, it's a long while since she took any notice o' me. But our Elsie's ys been a clever and—what's better still—a good girl. I can see got a good husband—as husbands go. And if she doesn't make a good wife, then I don't know what he wants—and he doesn't, ier. So we'll just fill up again, and I'll say—here's to 'em!"

is was felt to be sound but not entirely adequate, and now Mr. on Mitcham rose both to his feet and the occasion. Two-thirds of eople there had not the slightest idea who he was, but he looked posing that immediately an awed silence fell on the company. He 1 by announcing that he felt very diffident, though it was difficult he keenest observer to detect the slightest signs of diffidence. He however, he went on to say, that it was his duty, as a fellow artiste, y something about Mrs. Herbert Dulver, long known to the Pro- n as Miss Elsie Longstaff. They had been on the road together, a rk that brought an enthusiastic "That's right," from Mr. Oakroyd, was beaming upon everybody. Mr. Mitcham then proceeded to op this theme of comradeship upon the road. Like the born orator as, he had the trick of making everything appear about ten times ze, and very soon it seemed as if he and Elsie had been on the together, the best of friends, for about half a century. You saw traversing continents, deafened by the applause of whole nations. ate of the English Stage was bound up, it appeared, with the his- of *The Good Companions,* a history that was already a gigantic Through his haze of sonorous words, the figures of Miss Trant nigo and the other Good Companions loomed titanically. The ture of Elsie was conjured into a thunderbolt from the malicious and you felt the earth shaking beneath its impact. All was gloom short space, but then the heavens brightened again. Apparently this marriage was the only thing that could possibly have enabled Mitcham to bear up under the sorrow of losing Elsie. You gath that it was an event to which he had been looking forward for y And Mr. Dulver was the one man in the world, it appeared, worth playing the chief part in it. He had the highest opinion of Mr. Du whom he had known intimately—or so he made it seem—for at ten years. And now, not only for himself, not only for his fellow m bers of the troupe, not only for the whole Profession, but on beha all these and of the audiences here, there and everywhere, that had t Miss Elsie Longstaff to their hearts, he wished them every happiness drank their very good health. This he did, amid applause and clin of glasses, in what appeared to be about half a pint of almost whisky, which went to join a good deal more of the same liquor was this noble draught that inspired him to rise again and point out these were the sentiments of a man who had been four times roun world.

Elsie, flushed with pride, happiness, and the sweet champagne, already looking more of a Dulver, was compelled to respond. She them she had had good times and bad times on the Stage, but m good times lately. At this point, her sister Effie suddenly and dramatically burst into tears. When Effie had subsided a little, went on to say that she did not expect to have all good times no was married, but felt sure she and Bert would be a happy pair, she would do her best. And all of them had been very kind and and she thanked them and hoped to see them all again before long. All the presents, she added, were beautiful. ("And so they from Miss Thong.) And now she and Bert would have to be g because they were catching the afternoon train down to Eastbea

Then followed any amount of hand-shaking, back-slapping, and ing. Everybody trooped below to give the pair a good send-off, an final scene outside the hotel when the two drove away and the company gave three cheers, under the joint leadership of the gi purple Dulver and Mr. Morton Mitcham, was so striking that Mr tearful but enraptured, said she had seen nothing like it since the to the second act of *The Rose of Belgravia,* in which she and Joe chambermaid and an ostler respectively, had sung side-by-side fo

t time. By this time, little Miss Thong had had so much excitement
t she looked blue and her teeth were chattering, so Miss Trant packed
into her car and took her back to Gatford, there to rest and have
uiet cup of tea. A few of the other guests also departed. The re-
nder went upstairs, some to talk, smoke and finish the bottle, some
lance.

Changes, ladies and gentlemen," roared Mr. Mitcham, as he reached
landing again. "Bound to come, bound to come. I know. I've
—keh—thousands of 'em. Very sad, but can't be helped—in-
t-able."

You've said it," cried Jimmy.

Thank you," he replied, simply but with great dignity, and then lit
ry large cigar that had been pressed upon him by an admiring Dul-
He and Jimmy and one or two others of vast experience formed
cle, while another was formed by several football-loving Dulvers and
Mr. Oakroyd, and Mr. Jock Campbell, who obliged by demonstrat-
with the aid of a bottle and two glasses and an ash tray, exactly
t happened when Everton scored that curious goal against Sheffield
dnesday and so won the Cup. And in various corners, the ladies,
ng whom Mrs. Joe was prominent, discussed weddings they had
and married couples they had known, and happily swapped remi-
ences in which obstetrics, accidents, operations, various internal dis-
rs, and deaths of every description, played their part.

here was dancing in the other room. This would not be worth
tioning if it were not for the fact that Susie and the dashing young
ver danced together all the time. Inigo was left with Miss Mamie
er, whose beautiful and extraordinarily intelligent legs enabled him
ake a fair show of what was certainly not one of his major accom-
ments. The dashing young Dulver could hardly be described as
od dancer—he threw himself about too much to be that—but he was
ast energetic and knowing, and therefore better than Inigo. There
one awful moment when Inigo imagined he caught a smile of
ion on the faces of Susie and her insufferable partner. They were
hing at him! After that he held Miss Potter so close and threw such
gy into his dancing that she had hardly breath enough to bring out
usual "I say." When at last their bus came and it was time to go,

Susie was not to be seen and neither was her cavalier, and it was
ported that he had taken her back to Gatford. "I say," said Miss Pott
"I don't admire her taste. I thought he was ghastly, didn't yo
And so he and Miss Potter sat in the back of the bus, close together, a
Inigo, his head a multicoloured whirl of drinks and dancing and glo
and gaiety, decided that he liked Mamie after all and that when t
reached the end of the journey he would kiss her. But by the time t
were back in Gatford, the gloom was spreading and his head ache
little and life seemed rather dreary and preposterous, and so inst
of kissing Miss Potter he hurried away to his rooms, to rest for an h
or two before the show began. At the end of that hour or two he
decided that he must have it out with Susie.

"This can't go on," he told himself—and her—sternly, as he brus
his hair and conjured his reflection into an image of a startled Su
"If you think I'm a man to be played with, you're wrong, absolute
No, that sounded ridiculous. Something cool and sneering might
better. "I must congratulate you on your friends. I am beginnin
wonder whether the honour of being considered one of them will
be too great a strain for me——" No, that would not do, either. "L
here, Susie, I've had enough of this," with quiet but manly determ
tion. Anyhow, he would have it out with her.

III

The time is a quarter to twelve on Thursday morning, the day
Elsie's wedding. The place is the little upstairs room (where there
plenty of cushions and you may smoke) of *Ye Jollie Dutche Caf*
Victoria Street, Gatford. In the far corner is a table that mus
distinguished from all the others if only because it is the only one t
on which any cups of Jollie Dutche coffee (*Our Speciality*) have
their appearance this morning. Behind it, sometimes lolling and s
times sitting bolt upright and looking very fierce, are two perso
tallish loose-limbed youth, with a long wandering nose and a long
dering lock of hair, and dressed in baggy and indiscriminate clo
and a pretty dark girl, a compact and shapely girl, artfully tricke
in black and scarlet. The waitress who served the two coffees-
wears a sort of federated Dutch costume, but has Gatford, Mundle

ort written all over her—recognised these two at once, and by this ne has told all the other waitresses downstairs that one of the girls om the Hippodrome, the funny dark one, and the piano-player are ove, having big coffees just like ordinary people. And we recognise em too: Miss Susie Dean and Mr. Inigo Jollifant.

'I never heard such cheek," Susie is exclaiming. "What's it got to do th you?"

'Oh, nothing, of course," the gentleman replies loftily. "Apologies interfering in your private affairs."

He is having it out with her, and so far it has come out badly, not at according to plan. Now he pulls away at his absurdly large cherry-od pipe, and tries to do that loftily too. Unfortunately, it will not w properly. If he had fifty pipes, they would not draw properly. s one of those mornings, not at all the time to have it out with any-dy, and especially Miss Dean.

However friendly we were," Susie continued, "you'd have no right talk to me like that. If I chose to talk to a man and dance with him, no business of yours. Besides, you know nothing about him."

I don't want to. I know enough about him to see that he's poisonous. t—as you say—it's no business of mine. I'm disappointed, that's all. ne girls might like that type of chap, but for you—*you*—even to look him, well, it sticks in my gullet, that's all! Why, even Mamie Pot-——" he was going on rashly.

Mamie Potter! You're not going to tell me what *she* thinks, are you? at would be the last straw. And you talk about people being poison-! But go on, go on. What did Mamie Potter say?"

It doesn't matter what she said," replied Inigo sulkily. The sooner s Potter was out of the conversation the better.

Of course it does! Your friend, Miss Potter! You ought to have n yourselves yesterday. And if we're going to tell one another who ought to know, it's my turn now, and I say, keep away from that . She's dead rotten from the knees up. Everybody's fed up with already—except you, of course. She'll wreck this show yet, if we're jolly careful. I know the sort."

She may be all that. I don't know, and I don't care," said Inigo, quite ing to sacrifice fifty Mamie Potters. "But what I *do* know and care about is that you behaved rottenly, absolutely, yesterday. You j flirted with that bounder, that pink teethy barman——"

"He's not a barman. And even if he was, you needn't sneer at hi If I liked him, I wouldn't care if he was a bottle-washer. I'm not li you, I'm not a little Cambridge snob."

"No one could ever call me a snob," said Inigo heavily.

"Aw—aw—couldn't they?" said Susie, in a wild burlesque of offended tone. "Well, I'm calling you one, and I believe you are o And if you're not one, then you're simply jealous."

"All right then, I'm jealous." Inigo sounded very sulky now.

"Then you shouldn't be jealous," said Susie severely. But then gave him a mischievous little glance. "Anyhow you oughtn't to horridly jealous. It's quite possible, I'm sure, to be nicely jealous."

"No, it isn't. I hate it. But it wasn't so much jealously as sheer like of seeing you make yourself so cheap with a bounder——"

"If you say another word, we shall quarrel properly," cried Su "That's the nastiest thing anybody's said to me for years. Apolo for 'cheap' at once or I'll never speak to you again. I mean it." A she really looked as if she meant it.

"I take it back then," Inigo muttered. "But you know what I me

"No, I don't, except that you're stiff and green with jealousy. A why you should be, I don't know. It isn't as if we've been very g friends lately."

"And whose fault's that?" he demanded.

"Yours. Of course, it's yours, Inigo," and she gave him a wide in cent stare.

"You know very well it's not. Look here, Susie, you've been unb able lately, absolutely. You know what I think and feel about you—

"No, I don't," she put in, immediately. "Tell me." And she lea back and gave him a delicious smile.

"Oh, I think you're——" he groaned. For a young man who inten to have it out, he was behaving very strangely.

"Go on, Inigo. Don't stop. Tell me." She made a show of sett herself very comfortably in her seat.

He pushed back his lock of hair, and then looked at her, stea gravely. "I'm not going to tell you any more, Susie," he said at t's all just fun for you. You don't really care a damn. Well, it isn't n for me, not just now, anyhow."

There was silence for a few moments, then Susie said, in a small ice: "Why don't you go on to the next part, Inigo?"

"What's that?"

"You ought to say now 'If you think I'm the kind of man you can ıy with, you're wrong.'"

Inigo looked confused, and, glancing at him, she laughed. Then she mmed a little tune.

"I'm going," he announced savagely.

"No, don't go." She laid her hand lightly on his. "I hate quarrelling. ıd if you go off in a rage, like that, you'll make me feel sorry I came e instead of accepting that Dulver man's invitation to go out in his today and have a fine fat lunch somewhere. Yes, he asked me, and s *most* pressing. And I refused. I saw quite enough of him yester-/."

I should think so," cried Inigo, highly relieved.

Not that being with you is much good, these days," she went on.

Why? What's the matter with me?" Then he suddenly changed his e. "I know there's nothing very wonderful about me——"

I'm sure you don't," she told him.

I suppose you're sick of seeing me about," he said, humbly. "And ironical thing is, I wouldn't *be* about here at all, if it weren't for you. at must be getting pretty obvious to other people too by now. Miss ınt pointed it out to me the other day. Because you're with the w, Susie, I couldn't drag myself away from it. If you went, I'm ned sure I couldn't stick it out another week."

That isn't saying much for the others," she told him.

Of course I like the others, at least most of 'em. It wouldn't break heart to see the last of Jerry J. or the Potter girl, but I'm very fond all the old ones now. But after all, I'm not in love with 'em."

Which means you are with me."

Absolutely."

Still?"

Worse than ever. So there you are. And if anybody had told me ear ago I should be dithering like this, I should have wanted to give him one on the jaw. And yet I wouldn't change it now, though a rotten dither it's been lately, I can tell you."

"Sorry, Inigo. Sorry—absolutely."

"Tell me, are you fed up with me? Does the sight of me mooni round make you feel sick these days? Or what is it?"

"Well," said Susie slowly and earnestly, "I've been in a queer sort mood lately, I know. And you've been so heavy and serious lately, t not half so amusing as you used to be. But it isn't just that. You— you irritate me!"

"Why? What do I do?"

"Oh, you're so—so—I don't know—feeble."

"Feeble!" It came out in a shout. He stared at her, amazed.

"Yes, feeble."

"Oh, am I, by jingo!" With that, the outraged young man sat suddenly flung an arm round her, twisted her round towards him, a kissed her soundly and well before she could do or say a single thi There are heavens that await only reckless men, and he spent a deliri minute in one of them. Then he found himself shot out of it, a back in *Ye Jollie Dutche Café* with all his courage evaporated. waited, breathless, for something momentous to happen now, and thou this creature by his side had been for some time the very centre of universe, he had not the least idea what would happen. He co almost feel himself cringing.

Susie was staring at him, her eyebrows raised, and breathing h "Well——" and then she suddenly laughed.

His bravado returned with a rush at the sound. "And that's the k of man I am," he announced.

"Well, it's not the kind of girl I am," she told him, "especially twelve in the morning in an imitation Dutch café. So don't tr again, that's all."

"Didn't you like it?"

"It made me feel quite sick," she said calmly, turning an impu face, still rosy and brilliant, towards him. "No, not again! Who do think you are? Now listen." She looked serious. "When I said were feeble, I didn't mean *that*. I meant you were feeble about wo ork!" Inigo pronounced the word as if he had never heard it re.

There you are, you see. You don't even know what I'm talking out. You're just a feeble amateur, that's all you are, Inigo. This P. business—the Stage, in fact—is just a bit of a game to you. Well, isn't to me. I'm a Pro. I'm not doing this for fun, young feller. aven't run away from school for a few months."

If you think I'm going back to that school or any school——" Inigo gan.

Never mind about that. It's me we're talking about now. I want to on and if I don't get on soon, I'll burst. Why, that Dulver man terday——"

nigo groaned.

One of the first things he told me," she continued, "was that he'd rd how clever I was and was coming to see me, because he knew ng Jack Rozzy very well, and young Rozzy is working with his ner now, old Rozzy, who's the booking agent for the P. M. H. ndicate——"

Help!" cried Inigo.

Don't be silly. Well, I didn't believe all he told me—the Dulver n, I mean—but still, it was *something.* You never know, something ght come of it. And at any rate he did understand I wanted to move a bit and not stick in this all my life."

But what do you want me to do? Have I to go to young Rozzy and him to tell old Rozzy——"

Oh, shut up! You think this is all nothing, and that's just what kes you so irritating. It's serious. Of course I don't want you to go any Rozzies. I don't want you to help me. I can look after myself. if you'd only go and get something done for yourself—and you could ly, with those songs—I wouldn't mind. I hate to see chances thrown ay. It makes me sick. It's the way you hang about and just don't anything that irritates me. It's so—so amateurish and feeble."

So that's it, is it?" said Inigo softly.

Yes, that's it," she replied defiantly. At this moment, another cusner arrived, a solitary man, who came in, as solitary men always do, y quietly. A few moments after, three men entered together, making as much noise as a little army, as three men always do. Appa all four were amateurish and feeble, for Susie regarded them with tempt.

Inigo had been fingering a card in his pocket. He still looked a agitated, but there was the ghost of a smile hovering on his face n "As a matter of fact——" he began; but then he must have thou this matter of fact should not be introduced into the conversation, he suddenly stopped short.

"Well? Go on." Susie looked at him, not unkindly but not with obvious signs of admiration.

"Nothing," he replied lamely.

Susie's rather full lower lip made a tiny movement that said q plainly: "You are exceedingly feeble, this very minute, and not my of a man at all." She flicked away some cigarette ash from her clo and then rose. "I must go."

Inigo returned to his lodgings, wondering whether he had "ha out" or not. Certainly a great deal had come out, but very little o had figured in his original programme. If it had not been for one th he would have felt miserable, crushed, about two feet high. That t was the card in his pocket. It had been his original intention to Susie about that card. The moment she had shown herself repenta perhaps a little tearful—he had decided to wave away all her apolo and then to raise her at once from the depths of contrition by sho her the card and telling her what he had planned to do with it. T moment, as we have seen, had never arrived, and so the card staye his pocket.

It had found its way there only that very morning, half an hour be he had left his rooms to meet Susie. A young man with a mast nose, wavy black hair, and a startling pink shirt and collar, had bu in on the very heels of the landlady, and had announced himself as Milbrau, Midland representative of Felder and Hunterman. "And can't say you don't know *them,* eh?" this visitor chuckled.

"Who?" Inigo was still rather dazed.

"Felder and Hunterman."

"I don't," said Inigo, looking at his visitor in astonishment, as he might, for that gentleman, with all the dexterous rapidity of a

, had put down his hat, taken a chair and drawn it nearer to the sat down, lit a cigarette, crossed his legs and rubbed his hands, all in flash of activity.

a-ha, 's a good one!" cried Mr. Milbrau. "Didden' think you'd p—'smatter of fact—but here y'are, up all ri' and having a dig at ld firm." He rubbed his hands harder than ever.

ut who are they?" demanded Inigo, in all earnestness. "I seem to heard the name before."

op it now," said Mr. Milbrau. "You can't grumble. I've bought it nsider I've bought it! Let's ge' down to business, and stop pulling eg."

n not pulling it, no intention of doing, absolutely," said Inigo, who not see why a strange young man in an angry pink shirt should in and talk about pulling legs. "All I say is that I seem to have the name of Whater and What's it before."

. Milbrau stared and his mouth fell open, though the cigarette still ined hanging from one corner of it and calmly went on smoking , as if specially trained to do so. "Seem to have heard the name!" lmost screamed. "Felder and Hunterman, biggest people in the -publishing trade today—*and* the oldest! And you a pianist! You have played thousands of our numbers. Oh, you can't mean it! , have a cigarette." And the very next second, there were two rows garettes about six inches from Inigo's nose.

go politely refused, and filled and lit a pipe while Mr. Milbrau ined why he had called. "I'm doing this Midland round, d'you songs and dance stuff," he began, "and these two days I'm here, e Triangle. Come here ev'ry two months. Went to your show las' . Nothing else to do—and then it's business with me, d'you see, ise we like to know how our numbers are going. And you surd me, I'll tell you that now. You did! You surprised me. You've classy little show there, an' I know 'cos I've seen hundreds—reds-anundreds. That comeediyenn—oh, clever kid, clever! Whasser ? Dean—that's it. And that boy doing your light comedy work dancing—that boy's good—he is—he's good. A nice li'l' show! jew, some of the numbers"—here he raised both hands, then let them fall—"dead—you couldn't kill 'em—they're dead. I'm travell about twenty numbers now—both sentimen'als and comics—an' the juss make the diff'rence to that show of yours, they would, juss diff'rence. No, no, wai' a minute, wai' a minute. Don't make a r take. I'm not here to sell you anything."

Inigo was relieved to hear it, though he did not say so. He waited his visitor, who was now lighting another cigarette, to continue.

"Here we are," said Mr. Milbrau, looking with half-closed eyes thro a cloud of smoke at a scrap of paper. "Now you got one or two nu bers in your show that were new to me—and they were—good." brought this last word with a shout. "Tricky numbers, real tric They got me going all ri' and I'm in the business d'you see. I put down on this bit o' paper. Don't say I got the titles ri' but you'll kn Now as a favour, juss as a favour, take a look at 'em." He handed the paper, and Inigo saw at a glance that all the five numbers, hea by *Slippin' round the Corner,* were the very ones he had composed h self.

"Now all those numbers you have there," Mr. Milbrau went on, new to me. And I'm in the business. And they're good, they're tri they're catchy. It's the chunes—words are nothing, written 'em my before now—it's the chunes! Now juss as a favour, jewmind tel me where you got 'em from? You're the pianist and so you kr 'em all, d'you see. That's why I come to you. Got your address night at the Hippodrome after the show. And I'm busy—I'm terr busy, gotter get away this afternoon—but I had to know. Now j mind telling me where you picked 'em up?"

"Not a bit," replied Inigo heartily. "I wrote them myself—the m you know."

"You did?"

"I did. As a matter of fact I've just finished writing them out p erly. There they are, on the table."

Mr. Milbrau jumped up, saying "Mind if I look?", and without w ing to know if Inigo minded or not, began to turn over the manus sheets and wag his head and hum now and again. When he had d he put the sheets neatly together and gave the pile a smart slap. "V

e you goin' to give 'em to?" he enquired, very quietly but with a
mentous air.

Not the least idea," Inigo told him. "I hadn't thought about it."

r. Milbrau shook his head. "Hadn't thought about it! Doesn't
w Felder and Hunterman! And turns out this stuff! Don't tell
you're a reg'lar pro—you're not—and I knew it right off. Suppose
wouldn't like me to take these along?" he enquired.

igo told him he would not.

No. Thought you wouldn't. All ri'—don't blame you. Now I'll
you something. If I was you—if I'd written these—jewnow what
do? I'll tell you. I'd put them in a bag, take my hat and coat
walk right out of that door, take the nex' train up and be at Felder
Hunterman's with 'em before they closed tonight. I would. An'
ouldn't play 'em another night, either. You don't know who's
ening. I tell you, I'd be up in the Charing Cross Road with these
mbers this afternoon and I'd stay there, never mind about the job
e. In a month you'd laugh at it. I'm excited about these num-
s. I don't look it but I am. But I'm not trying to rush you into
thing, am I? You listen to me, Mr. Jollifant. Don't send these
mbers anywhere. Take 'em. Go with 'em. Play 'em through
rself—once—thass all. An' if you go to Felder and Hunterman's—
they're the biggest people in the trade today—once'll be enough.
ke 'em to Felder and Hunterman's an' ass for Mr. Pitsner—P-i-t-s-n-e-r
say I told you. Here, I'll tell you wha' I'll do. I'll write to Mr.
sner myself—an' tell him. I'll write tonight. Bedder le' him know
r coming. Send him a wire. Busy man, Mr. Pitsner. You'd never
him if you hadn't an intro, but when you do see him, 's'business.
re, I'll write on this card too as well's send a letter. You show 'em
', you'll walk up withou' a wor'." Thus Mr. Milbrau, who ended
gabbling so furiously that there was hardly a consonant left in his
ech.

And that is how Inigo came to be in possession of the card that
ed him from feeling absolutely crushed after his talk with Susie.
ck in his lodgings, he took it out of his pocket, put it on the table,
d then smoked a pipe over it. Feeble, was he?

IV

The various encounters of that week may appear to be of little or importance, but actually all of them, whether real or imaginary (for do not know whether Miss Trant saw Dr. Hugh McFarlane or on thought she did), were important to the people who took part in the and indeed to many other people too. And the last encounter of th all is no exception. It happened on the Thursday evening, in the t room of the *Market Tavern,* the public house that adjoins—as it shou —the space just behind Victoria Street where Gatford still has a week open market. The day for that market is Thursday, so that the *Mark Tavern* was fairly crowded when Mr. Oakroyd visited it, a little aft six, on this particular Thursday evening. Mr. Oakroyd knew that would be crowded, having been long enough in Gatford to know about such things. It was his habit to enjoy a half-pint about this tin every evening, before he began his night's work at the theatre. Som times he liked a quiet, peaceful, meditative half-pint, and at other tim he preferred a noisy, gregarious half-pint. It depended upon his mo When a glass of beer is one of a man's few pleasures and luxuries, will not casually swill it down, not caring when or where he drin it. He will exercise to the full his power of choice. That is why pla like Bruddersford are full of public houses. To the outsider, anybo who does not understand such matters, these public houses look alike, but to Mr. Oakroyd and his friends they are as different fro one another as the books in a bedside shelf are to an old reader, ar a pint at one of them is entirely different from a pint at the next on

On this Thursday evening then, Mr. Oakroyd, alone, in need of nois cheerfulness, company, possibly the company of other men who kne the road, decided for the *Market Tavern.* The taproom was all a ba ble and a haze, so crowded that it took him nearly ten minutes to pus his way through, order his half-pint, and finally receive it over th dripping bar-counter from Joss, the big barman there. During th anxious interval, he had nodded to a few *habitués,* and that was al he had not time to have a look round the place, which was incidental the largest taproom in all Gatford. There seemed to be a lot of strange about, but then there usually was on Thursdays, chaps in from th r districts and the country, and chaps who sold things in the market nuine men of the road, though not on the grand scale. Once he edged away from the bar-counter, taken a pull at his half-pint, seen that his pipe of *Old Salt* was going well, Mr. Oakroyd began ook about him.

Ow do," several acquaintances called out.

Na then," replied Mr. Oakroyd affably, giving them a nod.

here were so many chaps standing in the middle of the room, a narrow room, chaps arguing in groups, that Mr. Oakroyd, who not strayed very far from the bar-counter, could not see the other But there was no reason why he should see it, and so he stayed re he was, not feeling at all lonely now because he knew quite he could join any of these groups if he wanted to and talk away ard as the next man. He was content to muse a little, and take in, out making any effort to listen, the scraps of talk that came flying every direction. "So I says to 'im, I says, 'Well, what of it? made you boss o' the job?' And 'e says 'Clever, arncher?' And I 'Clever, yer bloody self!'——" Then, from the other side: "I her 'e did, I betcher. Time me an' Jimmy went to Birmingham, 'e 'Ere, Jimmy, 'alf a minute!" Somewhere behind was the usual ical reasoner: "Government can't do it, I tell yer. It doesn't matwhat *you* say, chum, they can't do it. They'd 'ave to pass a lor re they could do it. Don' chew believe Government can do what like, chum." And so it went on, and Mr. Oakroyd, who had d it—or something like it—many times before, listened with a touch omplacency. These chaps were all right, but most of them would etter to talk less until they had seen something. He, who had seen t in his time and might now see a great deal more before he had hed, was saying nothing. Still, they could go on talking: it did n no harm.

moment came, however, when most of the chaps who had been ing at the tops of their voices suddenly fell silent, and there followed of those curious lulls common to all companies. It was then that Oakroyd heard a voice coming from the far end of the room. came to the back o' the stall, see," it said. "Big feller—proper en stoner—but all blown out, all beer and wind, an' yeller blobs under 'is eyes like fried eggs—nuthin' to him. An' when 'e get the back o' the stall, 'e takes a good look at me. 'That's right,' I ''ave a ruddy good dekko, Mister Sexton Blake. An' bring P the blood'ound nex' time.' Oh, you should 'ave seen 'im! 'That'll 'e says—usual style, see——" And having heard so much, Mr. Oakr immediately began threading his way through the crowd to that co of the room. There could be no mistake about it. That was the v —never to be forgotten—of his old companion of the road, Joby Jack

Mr. Oakroyd found him in the furthest corner, the centre of a l admiring group. He wore the same red scarf and if the suit he ha was not the very same brown check he had worn before, it was t brother to it. His face was as red and his eyes as bright as ever, if there was any change in him it was merely that he did not l quite so dashing as he had done last autumn. Winter, his lean per had left some faint mark upon him. For a minute or two he too busy concluding his story of the big puffy man, a story that manded a wealth of illustrative gesture, to notice Mr. Oakroyd, stood a yard or two away, holding his half-pint and puffing a at his little pipe, too shy to interrupt but determined to be seen.

"Well," said Joby, having dismissed the big puffy man, to ev body's admiration, "what about some more pig's ear. 'Ere, I'm pay for this lot. Same again, boys?"

He jumped up, and caught sight of Mr. Oakroyd. He stared; frowned; then delighted recognition lit up his face. "'Ello, I kn you! It's George. George with the little straw basket!"

"That's right," grinned Mr. Oakroyd.

Joby pushed his way round the table and clapped Mr. Oakroyd the shoulder. "You mended the old stall. 'Alf a minute, where it? I know. Don't tell me. We went to Ribsden, didn't we? T time big Jim Summers started 'is bit o' bother. But you didn't l 'ere, did you? Up in Yorkshire, wasn't it? Good old George! 'E I've wondered about you many a time, you an' your little straw bas —four days at Sunny Southport that ruddy little basket was—an' y bag o' tools. 'Strewth, George, fancy you turning up agen! 'Ere, must 'ave a gill or two an' then you can tell me the tale. Never mi them fellers, they can wait."

y, I will that," said Mr. Oakroyd, one vast delighted grin. "I e fair capped when I heard you. 'Eh,' I says to mysen, 'that's Joby.' just sup this off, then we'll ha' some more. Well, ar yer getting on, lad? Is trade i' rubber dolls keeping up these days?"

'Aven't seen a rubber doll for months," Joby replied. He began ring two half-pints and kept on ordering them until he was served. ," he said, wiping some of the froth off his face, "I'm out o' that . Did well at Nottingham Goose Fair, then Tommy Muss—re- nber Tommy, 'im an' the tart?—'e sloped agen—an' then I started -shiftin', see. Got up Newcastle way and gets playin' pontoon back boozer up there an' loses the 'ole ruddy issue, stall and all—what e!"

hat about mottercar?" Mr. Oakroyd enquired sympathetically.

h, poor old Liz! She was napoo before I got up to Newcastle, after I cleared out o' Nottingham, blind to the world. She gets ' down a ruddy 'ill, see, an' I can't stop 'er. Down the other side e's one o' these removin' vans big as a row of 'ouses coming. I s the old bus a turn at the bottom—an' wallop!—we're into the with our guts droppin' out. The poor old bitch 'ad got all 'er t smashed in. 'Finee!' I says, an' gets the stuff out, waits for the feller with a lorry to give me a lift for arf a dollar, an' leaves 'er e, proppin' the wall up."

owt else to be done, I can see that," said Mr. Oakroyd, nodding ly. "Cost you more ner it 'ud be worth. Eh, but it's a pity! I've t monny a time abart yon mottercar, all fixed up to live in. It champion."

ou wait a bit, George. I'll 'ave another before you can turn round. 'ow, I'm properly in the cart after losing the lot in this boozer. I nges round a bit, an' then I meets a feller I know who's with ni's Continental Circus, goin' round to old skatin' rinks an' cov- -over swimmin' baths with a lot o' cockatoos an' dancin' dogs an' gy monkeys an' a couple of old trottin' ponies—see? You never such a piecan of a circus. I could make a better one out o' the ket 'ere. But this feller—a feller called Johnny Dooley, a bit of a —'e says 'I can get you in. It's better than nothin''—so 'e gets job. An' what d'you think I was, when I wasn't feedin' the dogs an' shampooin' the cockatoos an' taking the tickets an' helpin' to m the how-d'you-do's? I'm Tonio the Famous Continental Clown. oughter see me, my God! An' gettin' two pound five a week—w you got it! Everybody in that ruddy circus was dying of 'unger, ho they was. Even the ponies could 'ardly stand up. If you saved and bought yourself a packet o' fags, it was much as your life worth. They'd 'ave murdered you for 'em. They tore 'em out of y 'and. When I'd been with 'em a month, I'd forgotten what a piec steak looked like. There was fellers that'ud eat anything—they'd eaten you. ' 'Ere,' I says, 'I've 'ad enough of this. Time to give Baronios and Tonios the soldier's farewell.' Then I meets a fell know who's running one o' these mug auctions, see."

All this, and a great deal more, describing Joby's adventures du the winter, was poured into Mr. Oakroyd's ear as they stood close gether, at no great distance from the bar. Two more pints, proc this time by Mr. Oakroyd, had been consumed by the time Joby neared the end of his recital. He was now, once more, an indepen trader with a little stall of his own, but only in a very modest "I've gone back to an old line," he concluded. "You'll 'ave see Joey in the Bottle. Little glass figgers—put 'em in a bottle full o' w —waggle the cork a bit an' these Joeys dance about, see. Old clever, amuses the kids! An' very cheap to buy. Money for du you've got a good pitch. Don't satisfy me, though. I'm 'elpin a f too when I'm not selling Joey—a feller that auctions oilcloth, s feller. I 'old the pieces up an' give 'em a bang to show it'll last you get 'ome. Workin' 'ard and savin' up, that's Joby just now, 'Ere, George, what you doin'? I'm tellin' all the ruddy tale."

Mr. Oakroyd stole a glance at the clock. By this time he was us at the theatre—he liked to be there early—and he would certainly to leave in a minute or two to be there on time at all. So he expla briefly what had happened to him since the autumn. Even then, h ever, he was interrupted. A big man with an immense grey moust pushed his way through the crowd and laid a hand on Joby's shou "Time to be off," he remarked, and disappeared.

"That's the oilcloth feller," Joby explained. " 'Ave to push off, Ge

what did you say this 'ere show o' yours is called? Did you say
: 'ere this week?"

at's right. *Good Companions,* they call 'em."

's eyes widened and his mouth puckered up, to whistle soundThen he looked grave, confidential. "You 'ad any bother there,
e, lately?" he asked quickly, with a rapid glance to left and

d'you mean?"

y kind o' bother?"

ll, there's been a bit o' calling out o' t'back," said Mr. Oakroyd.
that's summat new to us. Giving t'bird they call it, but funny
, all t'rest o' t'audience fair goes off their heads, they likes it so
It's nobbut a few o' t'back."

watch out, George," said Joby, buttoning up his coat. "You're
a lot o' bother if you're not careful. Never mind 'ow I know.
do know, see. You watch it, George. No, I can't stop. 'E's
. Come in 'ere agen and look out for me." And, without anword, he was gone.

Mr. Oakroyd did go in again and look out for him. He went
Friday, and at dinner-time on Saturday, but Joby was not to be
Curiously enough, there was no more "bother" either on
lay or Friday nights, and all the *Good Companions,* little knowhat was in store for them, congratulated themselves on being
last of the few stamping and jeering hooligans in the audience.
akroyd himself, however, was not so sure. It was all very mys-
. Even Mr. Jock Campbell, on being consulted, could make
g of it, though it was his opinion, the result of long experience in
that all crowds were partly composed of lunatics. And though
is all very well, the fact remained—and Mr. Oakroyd could not
it—that he had been told to look out and watch it by Joby
, who was sane enough, a philosopher of the road.

Chapter Three

INIGO IN WONDERLAND

I

INIGO noticed, without surprise, that the Gatford Hippodrome
elongating itself, swelling, soaring, conjuring out vast dark
sweeps of galleries. This made it all the more difficult to find
It was like playing hide-and-seek in the Albert Hall. After he
walked about quarter of a mile round the back of one enormous e
gallery, he suddenly discovered Mr. Milbrau of Messrs. Felder
Hunterman standing by his side. "'Scuse me," Mr. Milbrau wa
ing, "but the Tarvins are here." Somehow this frightened Inigo.
hurried away, ran down a colossal flight of steps, and entered a
gallery. He must find Susie at once, and he knew that she was i
of these galleries. Halfway round he came upon Mr. Milbrau
"Here he is," Mr. Milbrau shouted; and immediately a number of
were turned on. The next moment Mr. Tarvin appeared, lo
much smaller and fatter than he had ever done before. "Ah,
you are, Jollifant," he said. "We're looking—chum-ha!—for you."
there, hurrying up behind him, was Mrs. Tarvin, a terrifying fi
Her head was so big. As big as a coal-scuttle and with eyes like
ing lamps! Horrible! He turned and ran, and then all the light
one dim glow, high up on the roof, went out. He raced frant
through deep menacing shadows. Gallery after gallery, innume
curved flights of steps, were passed in this wild descent, but at la
arrived at the floor of the theatre. And it was packed with p
They were even standing in all the gangways. Now the place
brilliantly lit, and it was obvious that the performance was abo
begin. He noticed for the first time that he was already in his
costume. He would have to push his way through all these p
He pushed and pushed and finally reached the stage, where Ji

waiting for him. There was something faintly sinister about
ıy. “Come on, Inigo,” he croaked. “You’re late. We’ve got a
stunt. Duets at the piano, that’s the idea. Got a new pianist.”
he hustled Inigo over to the piano. And there, waiting for him,
this horrible huge-headed Mrs. Tarvin, nodding and grinning.
on’t,” Inigo shrieked. But Jimmy’s grip on his arm had tightened.
l ri’, quite all ri’,” said Mr. Milbrau, who appeared to be holding
now on the other side. Inigo struggled but he could not free
elf.

oy, justa minute, ju-ust a mi-in-ute!” This voice did not belong
her Jimmy or Mr. Milbrau. It was a new voice. It had no part
e proceedings. It seemed to stop everything.

go stared at the man opposite, stared at his big blue-veined nose,
cheeks, and gingerish moustache. These features, he remem-
l now, belonged to the man who had entered the carriage with
at Gatford station. Yes, he was in a railway carriage. That was
ght—he ought to be in a railway carriage. But why? Then, as
hook himself, yawned and rubbed his eyes, it all came back. It
Saturday morning and he was on his way to see Mr. Pitsner of
er and Hunterman. He had wired Mr. Pitsner yesterday, Friday
ning, and that gentleman, who must have received Mr. Milbrau’s
had replied: *Yes come along can hear songs eleven and twelve*
rrow. And then he had had to work it all out with a time-table.
to get to London and back between the end of Friday night’s
and the beginning of Susie’s birthday tea-party this very after-
ı?—that had been the problem. It had meant catching a fiendishly
train from Gatford to Birmingham and then getting the express.
this was that early train. The mere snatch of sleep, the shivering
ı and shave in the darkness, the scalding gulp of tea, the dash to
station through the queer dim streets. And here he was. And
dy knew anything about it, he reflected, hugging himself. Not a
l about Mr. Milbrau and Felder and Hunterman and this flying
to London had escaped him. Ah!—that was deep. He meant
bring it on them as a surprise when he returned, that is, of course,
ıything happened worth springing. If nothing happened, then no-

body would be any the wiser. He was not going to let her think feebler than ever.

He sat up and rubbed his hands. He felt cold and stiff and pleasantly empty. It was too early in the day to be riding in tr absolutely. The windows still showed a flash of angry red sky, a chilly vapour hung about the flying fields. His eyes were hot heavy, and somehow he had to stare hard at things to see them p erly. Even then they did not seem very real. His dream hung a the fringes of his consciousness like the mist on the fields out This world of the cold railway carriage and the dawn breaking an unknown landscape appeared to have little more solid reality that other world of the long dark galleries, the ever-appearing Mil and the monstrously-headed Mrs. Tarvin. But this world, thoug might have its minor discomforts, was infinitely the more plea And warming, quickening, at the heart of it was his sense of the venture. These two feelings never really left him all that day. In last little room, the inmost place, of his mind was a tiny Inigo hug himself and crooning over the adventure. And because the day star like a dream, in the darkness and hurried him at once into the unfami it never quite lost its unreality; it might be large and highly-colou and crowded with moving shapes, but it always remained brittle, re to be smashed into smithereens by a mere cry of "No, you don't!"

"'Aving a bit of a tussle, wasn't you?" the man opposite gru amiably. "Bootin' 'em a bit, eh? Gave my ankle a good old ra can tell yer."

"Sorry!" said Inigo, and admitted he had been dreaming. The o other person in the compartment, one of those little old women seem to be for ever travelling on unimaginable errands, whatever hour or route, was dozing in her corner.

"Saw yer drop off just after we starts," the man went on. "I caught this bleeder three times this last fortnight—'ad to. My mis says we'd better go and live in Brum an' 'ave done with it. Does like getting up an' making me my bit o' breakfus', an' yer can't bla 'er." He brought out a small tin, selected a cigarette end, which contrived to light after it had been tucked away under his large mo tache. "I've offered to make my own breakfus' but that don't do he continued, complacently blowing out smoke. "Muss 'ave a r breakfus', she says, me goin' out like this, an' so she sees I 'as

go tried to imagine a deliciously domestic Susie insisting upon aving a proper breakfast on a morning like this, but he did not ed in creating a convincing image of her in the part. Would she even share a breakfast with him? He had never thought of her g breakfast, but now that meal, hitherto regarded as a very prosaic ess, a mere gobbling of eggs and bacon, became touched with er and romance. He heard her voice—he could always hear her though he could never call up her face—asking him to pass the alade. He saw himself as a delightful attentive breakfast com- n, without stopping to reflect that never in his life so far had he any signs of being any such thing.

e London express offered him breakfast as soon as it left Birming- and he accepted its offer with alacrity. It was full of people appeared to be old friends. Even the ticket-collectors and dining- ttendants seemed to know everybody. Men leaned across Inigo k one another where old Smith was. He had hardly begun his dge before the man sitting next to him suddenly turned and ed: "Hello! Wondered where you were. I say, is there any in that story about Bradbury and Torrence?" Inigo, startled, about to stammer that he had not the least idea, when he dis- ed that his neighbour was not addressing him at all but a man chipping an egg at the other side of the aisle. And though the -collector examined his ticket and the attendants brought him food, did it impersonally, without any of those remarks about the weather the number of people on the train that seemed to be offered to body else. At first he felt as if he had blundered into a party by a complete stranger, perhaps the Lord Mayor of Birmingham. r a time, however, he merely felt that he was not really there at The train and its passengers did not believe in him.

chance remark might break the spell. He tried the experiment at nd of breakfast, when the man next to him was lighting a pipe.

say—er—what time do we get in?" said Inigo.

es, rather," the man replied, poking at his pipe. And then he

looked across the table at the man opposite, and, raising his voice,
"I told Mason the other day that the Chamber of Commerce p
were making a big mistake."

"Mistake!" roared the man across the table. "They're makin
biggest bloomer I ever heard of."

Inigo's neighbour nodded vigorously, gave another poke or tw
his pipe, then turned sharply. "What d'you think?" he enquired

Inigo was quite ready to damn the Chamber of Commerce hea
but once more it was the man at the other side of the aisle, the
chipper, the man who knew about Bradbury and Torrence, who
being addressed. And this fellow crossed over, put an arm at
back of Inigo's seat, leaned forward, so far forward indeed that I
could easily have set fire to his beard and thought once of doin
and then replied: "I'm not so sure about that, my boy. Remem
what happened after the Stavely Commission? Well, it might e
happen again—in *my* opinion."

It was very odd. Inigo did not seem to be there. They did not
pear to believe he was a real person. But as he knew very well
he was there and that he was a real person, this only meant that
dreamlike sensation persisted, robbing even a London express o
substantiality and turning roaring tons of business men into fli
shadows. Even when they finally chuff-chuffed into the terminus,
sensation still remained. There was nothing about that gloomy p
tasmagoria to suggest that reality was breaking through. The p
looked as if it had been designed by the same mad architect who
built the colossal Gatford Hippodrome of dreamland. Inigo hur
out of it.

II

It was too early to go to Felder and Hunterman's, and Inigo was in
mood for exploring London. Besides, the streets were being slas
with cold rain. One minute a pale sun would creep out and set ev
thing glittering, and the next minute the rain would come swee
down, up would go overcoat collars and umbrellas, and the str
would be full of people running as if for their very lives. A lun
city. Inigo went into a tea-shop not far from the station, and there orde

of coffee that he did not want. This tea-shop had the air of eing in the hands of charwomen. There were no charwomen to n but the place seemed to smell damply and cheerlessly of their rs, and Inigo felt that at any moment a number of them would trooping back to dry it off. The waitresses looked as if they had et recovered from a bitter reveille that had dragged them out of little bedrooms, miles away in East Ham and Barking, and brought sniffing in cold buses and trams and tubes to this tea-shop. customer, every order, was to them an affront. Their day had eally begun; they had hardly washed themselves yet; and as a t against being disturbed so early they banged down sugar-basins ruets on the little damp marble-topped tables. At close range used the sniff, and at a distance the yawn. Such patrons as they however, seemed completely indifferent, in no way affected by marks of contempt. They sat lumpishly, unstirring, at their tables, as stolid and incurious as the bags they had dumped down them. The one exception was Inigo, who found himself com- l to order, receive, and sip his coffee with an apologetic air. There however, an Inigo inside, the skipper on the bridge, who was ly indignant and protesting. There appeared to be a general con- y to pretend that he was feeble, of no account. And this tiny ng Inigo inside asked everybody and everything in this huge ic warren of a London to wait, that's all, just wait.

s true that when he was actually on the way to Felder and Hunter- s he suddenly felt ridiculous. The whole enterprise lost its sanity, ed daft and hollow. What was he doing here with his parcel of ongs? He ought to be going to Newman and Watley, the scholas- ents. They were solid and sensible. Their talk of French, History, E., some games, £150 Resident, was reasonable, and not at odds these offices and shops and buses and policemen. But Felder and erman? Jingling songs? *Slippin' round the Corner?* Preposterous, utely! He was making a fool of himself. Everything he saw e streets announced that there was probably no such person as Mr. er. The very name shattered conviction. By the time Inigo had ied Charing Cross Road, he was troubled by a little hollow place somewhere in the region of his stomach. He did not want to g further.

There was still plenty of time, so he allowed himself to loiter. began to look at shops. That saved him. Mr. Pitsner became real He had strolled into a little world in which the silliest jingle of a was more important than Newman and Watley and all their cl He had now no excuse for believing that his visit was ridic Charing Cross Road was bursting with songs. If the shops wer filled with sheets of music, then they were filled with gramophone records and saxophones and drums and banjos. The place se to be a Jazz Exchange. Moreover, he saw rows of songs that he already played himself and dismissed as poor stuff. He marched one shop and glanced through about twenty of its newest songs, most of them were so bad that he found himself gleefully whisp "Tripe, tripe!" His self-confidence returned with a rush. These p thought day and night about these jingles, and even then they c only bring out this muck. He hesitated no longer, but marched Felder and Hunterman with all colours flying. He would show t

"I want Mr. Pitsner please," he said sternly, handed over a card, then without paying any more attention to the assistant, looked a him with a nonchalant, faintly contemptuous air. He refused t impressed, though there could be no doubt that Mr. Milbrau had right when he had said that his firm was the biggest in the tr The place was fantastic. It was a vast bustling warehouse of su sentiment and cheap cynicism. Lost sweethearts—in waltz time the key of E flat—were handled here by the hundredweight. wildering rows of smiling negroes implored you, in spite of the that they were clearing anything from two hundred pounds a upward in London and occupying luxurious suites of rooms and ri about in gigantic cars, to take them back to their shack in Southl "Just Little Miss Latch-Key!" one wall screamed at you. "S'Impossib another replied. "She's a Blonde on Saturdays," one row sneered, to be answered, two hundred times over, by a companion row cried: "She's All I've Got." And these were not merely songs. least of them were Gigantic Successes. They were Hits, Whirlwi Riots, Ear-Haunters, Red Hots, Stormers. Messrs. Felder and Hun announced they were "Handing You Another." Mr. Felder told in large crimson type, to "Get It Now and Watch It Grow!" Mr. erman promised that it would be "The Sensation This Season ouglas and Blackpool!" And together they implored you to be- them when they said: "It's the Big Hit They'll Ask to Have ged at Them!" They told you frankly they were compelling every band in the country to play it, they were sweeping the North, were sending the West End crazy. And they were proud of it. go shrugged his shoulders. He still refused to be impressed. Oh, Pitsner would see him, would he? Very well. He stalked after ssistant, down the corridor, into the lift. Mr. Pitsner's room ap- d to be at the top of the building and so he had ample time to ine what Mr. Pitsner would look like. He saw a sort of super au, older, fatter, and more Hebraic, with even blacker hair and r shirt. He braced himself to meet this loud, hearty, designing v.

did not meet him, however. He met a thin grey man, very in manner and dress, a man who looked as if nothing had sur- d him for twenty years. He gave Inigo the impression that he tired and that he knew a great deal. Possibly he was tired of ving a great deal. There was no mistake, though. This was Mr. er.

m glad to see you, Mr. Jollifant," he said in a low and rather mourn- oice. "I'm not always here on Saturday. In fact, I'm nearly always me. But this time you've caught me. People don't usually get into oom when they've just brought a few new numbers to us. If they I should never be able to get into it myself. But I had Milbrau's about your things, you see. And Milbrau's a very smart man." go, who had accepted one of the fat Egyptian cigarettes that Mr. ner had silently offered him, agreed that Mr. Milbrau was a very t man.

es," Mr. Pitsner continued sadly, "he's one of our smartest young . In fact, I'm thinking of taking him off the road. He's got thing of a flair, something. I've backed his judgment once or twice been rather fortunate. He seems to have been quite carried away by these things of yours. It's surprising," he added, in exactly the mournful low tone, "but that doesn't happen once in five years, n new work coming from—well, if you don't mind my saying so— an outsider. People think it's always happening, but it isn't. You pianist, aren't you?"

Inigo briefly explained what he was and what he had done, and Pitsner listened politely but with a sort of quiet despair. When I had done, Mr. Pitsner touched a bell and told the girl who answ to send Mr. Porry in. "I'd like Porry to hear them," he said, w ing the smoke curl from his cigarette. "He's our memory man. never forgets a tune."

Inigo was bold enough to say that he hoped Mr. Porry would remember these tunes too well. The moment he had spoken, h gretted having done so, but Mr. Pitsner, though it had been hint him that he might be a possible thief, showed no signs of resentm He merely shook his head. "We shan't steal them, if that's what mean," he said. "It wouldn't pay us. Some people would, people small way. But it wouldn't be worth our while. As a matter of Porry's here to prevent you stealing. No old stuff, you see, with a or two altered. That won't do. If we want anything like that can manufacture it here. Now would you like Porry to run thr them on the piano or will you do it yourself?"

Inigo said he would do it himself, but he did not feel very che about it. No worse audience than Mr. Pitsner could possibly imagined. It was incredible that he could be connected in any with the rows of silly songs and the photographs and the screan placards below. It did not look as if earthquakes and revolutions c arouse in him the least interest, let alone a few jingles. Mr. Porr nondescript middle-aged man, arrived and accepted one of those cy Egyptian cigarettes, and then Inigo dashed into one of his later n bers. Having got through one, he did not wait to hear any comn from the two sitting behind him, but went straight onto the r keeping that *Going Home* number of Susie's and *Slippin' round Corner* until the last. By the time he had come to these two, he lost any feeling of diffidence. He was simply enjoying himself at again, and if Messrs. Pitsner and Porry did not like it, they could well lump it. He slipped round the corner with all his old mis- ous spirit. The music was in front of him, just as a matter of ; he never looked at it. He let the old tune rip, and as he played, little images of people and places, from Mrs. Tarvin and Wash- Manor to Rawsley and Sandybay and Susie and Elsie, Miss Trant Oakroyd, came glimmering and joggling through his mind.

-ha, a-ha!" a great voice roared in his ear. "What have we here? n to this, Monte. *Tumty-tum-tidee-dee.* Don't stop, ol' man, don't Let her have it once more."

vo other men were now in the room. The one who was imploring not to stop was a big fellow with a paunch, a swollen face, and mourous eye. That was Mr. Tanker. The other, Monte, was no than Mr. Monte Mortimer, whose name was known even to Inigo, did not pretend to much knowledge of the theatre, as a producer vues. Mr. Mortimer was rather like a smallish, plump, and shaven rian. He would have looked perfectly at home superintending the rations for some gorgeous and possibly depraved entertainment e Court in Nineveh. This life of big hits and gigantic successes not left him so weary as it had Mr. Pitsner, but on the other hand ad nothing of Mr. Tanker's gusto and goodfellowship.

d like to hear those things through," said Mr. Mortimer, after had been introductions and explanations.

r. Pitsner nodded. "You ought to. I'd thought about you before came in. I rather think they're what you're looking for," he d, in his usual tones of quiet despair.

wo sure winners there at least, if you ask me," Mr. Porry put in, the air of a man who knows the value of his opinion even though s not been sought.

hat last is one, Porry," cried the genial Mr. Tanker. "It's tricky. ally is, by God it is. Tricky. You could plug that one till the roof t, Monte, and they wouldn't mind. Not like most of the bitchy we have to keep playing. Have you got the words there, ol' ? Good. Well, when you come round to that one again, I'll sing I will, I'll sing it. And don't let anybody tell me after this that

we baton-waggers are jealous. We don't know what jealousy is.
then, ol' man, let her have it again."

Inigo did let her have it, and Mr. Tanker, who was Mortimer's r
cal director and a composer of these things himself, stood by the p
humming and tapping and beating time, putting in some amusing
saxophone, banjo, and trombone parts. When they came to *Sli*
round the Corner, he produced a husky little tenor voice that b
manfully with the song. Inigo, who by this time had decided th
did not give a damn for any of them, darted and flashed among
keys, in which antics he was finally assisted by Mr. Tanker, who p
fantastic little variations, in the high treble. And now another
was there, humming away. It had brought with it all the perfum
Araby. Inigo was aware of a presence somewhere near him, but
he had banged the final chord there was no time to make out wh
was.

"Whoa!" cried Mr. Tanker, mopping his brow. "Hello, Ethel!
that a beauty? They're all damned good, but the last two are
hell-busters."

"Don't tell me you wrote that, Jimmy," said the lady who had
arrived. She spoke in a strong metallic voice, and indeed she lo
a strong metallic person. Inigo recognised her at once as Miss I
Georgia, the well-known revue and musical comedy artiste. He
seen her on the stage once or twice, and had seen dozens of ph
graphs of her. Behind the footlights she was a ravishing creature,
at close range everything about her, her face, her figure, her clo
her voice, her whole personality, was overpowering, too stunning. I
felt as if he were being introduced to an amiable blonde tigress.

"He's just popped in from Little Woozlum or Puddleton-on
Slag," Mr. Tanker explained, "and brought in a bunch of win
That's one you've just heard."

"What you have just heard, ladies and gentlemen," Miss Ge
wheezed nasally, in a parody of those dance-band men who anno
their tunes, "is Ethel Georgia's new number, to be featured with s
tional success in Mr. Monte Mortimer's forthcoming revue *Who D*

"I'm not so sure about that, Ethel," Mr. Mortimer called out.

am, Monte," she retorted, with a flash of personality that was like ıgnesium flare. "I want it."

Ve'll see about that," he replied, easily. There was, however, a cer- suggestion that he had tamed tigresses in his Assyrian days and could do the trick, if necessary.

ıey all began talking at once, even the mournful Pitsner, who some- contrived to hold his own with the others without raising his flat voice. Meanwhile, however, Inigo found himself talking to another arrival who must have come in with Miss Georgia. He was a rotund w, most unwisely dressed in a plus-fours suit of glaring Harris tweed. e peered at Inigo through a pair of horn-rimmed glasses, Inigo felt there was something familiar about this rather droll face.

d like to have a look through those other numbers," he said, "be- Ethel grabs the lot." Miss Georgia was now in the middle of the ı, arguing with Mortimer and Tanker. "If she gets her lily-white l on 'em, no earthly chance for yours truly, She's a terror. I'll bet e wondering what the devil I'm doing here in these clothes. Well, ell you. I ought to be just laying one nicely on the green now, ıt Esher, but she rings me up, not ten minutes before I was due to . And did I get my golf? Be yourself! Drags me round here, d everywhere. And I've got a matinée this afternoon. I've to be y from ten to three until five to five. She's all right, she's not work- ill Monte puts on his new show. But look at me. Still working, ırsing Monte's show—or what there is of it—and then can't get a d of golf in. Oh, she's wicked! Here, even the wife's frightened er. 'Tell her you won't go,' she says to me. 'Tell her yourself,' 's. And did she? What a hope! Now let's have a look at these s."

this time Inigo thought he had recognised him. "Aren't you Mr. ed Nott?"

am. I'm the only man in England who is not not Mr. Alfred Nott. you squeeze a laugh out of that? I thought not. Trouble about gag is, if you're sober it doesn't amuse you and if you're canned, can't work it out. Every time I used to meet old Billy Crutch when as soaked, I used to tell him that one, and believe me or believe me it bothered him so much he always ordered a black coffee and then went home in a cab, to think it out. Here, this looks a good nur Just tiddle it quietly, will you, old boy?"

But Inigo was not allowed to do any quiet tiddling. The o pounced upon him, though even when they had him in their midst still went on talking to one another. It is true they were talking a him. He could not help wondering what would happen if he qu walked out.

"The point is, Pitsner, you've got to let me have the first cut," Mr. Mortimer. "And so long as the rights are tied up——"

"So long as they are," said Mr. Pitsner, out of the depths of his w cynicism and Egyptian smoke.

"Well, you know that's all right so far as we're concerned. You tie that string on the dog's tail now," Mr. Mortimer continued.

Miss Georgia yawned spectacularly at the lot of them. "Hurry up God's sake, Monte, and buy that bunch, anyhow. You've got one n ber so far that's worth a damn, and I brought that one in."

"Right, Ethel, quite right," said Mr. Tanker heartily. "I know 'c wrote some of the duds myself. But then I'm not jealous. I'm n comedienne."

"Aren't you, Jimmy?" she cried. And then she let out a sudden peal of laughter. "You never know till you've tried. A bit of crêp Chine, Jimmy, and some powder might work miracles. Come ro and I'll see what I can do for you, sweetie."

"Keep the big gags for the night, Miss Georgia," said Mr. Ta with tremendous mock severity. "And now let's get on with the b ness. I'm thirsty."

Mr. Pitsner held up his hand and looked at Inigo. "We like t things of yours, Mr.—er—Jollifant——"

"You've got it in you, my boy," the irrepressible Mr. Tanker put clapping Inigo on the shoulder. "Your fortune's made—nearly."

"The point is this." It was Mr. Mortimer's turn now. "I can all those numbers you've got there. And some more, if they're as g And some more after that. Performing rights, sheet music, gramoph records—well, you know what happens or you ought to. There's b of money in it, as you know, bags and bags. And Mr. Pitsner here I can start you going. All right. Well, I understand you came up

Felder and Hunterman. You're not tied up to anybody else, not even otiating with 'em, is that right?"

Correct, absolutely," replied Inigo cheerfully. "Nobody in London heard these things, though I don't mind telling you they've been a ssal hit in all sorts of places you've never heard of. With my troupe, know."

That's what Milbrau wrote to me," said Mr. Pitsner sadly. "Getting tremendously in—where is it? Gatford. He said they were eat- it."

Good! I'll bet they were," cried Mr. Mortimer, who seemed to be n excellent temper now. "Well, my—Mr.—er—Jollifant—you've come e right firm here, no doubt about that, and of course you'll be willing ublish here. That right?"

should think so."

nd as you happen to be a lucky man," Mr. Mortimer continued othly, "you've struck—this morning of all mornings—the one man s looking for you. That's me. I could easily come the old game, urage you, say we've plenty of stuff just as good, and so on, but that's my style, and if it was, I shouldn't be Monte Mortimer——"

o three cheers for the red, white and blue," cried Miss Georgia de- ely. "Band, please!"

you're solid with Felder and Hunterman, that'll do Mr. Pitsner Now I come in. I use those numbers"—he paused impressively— I use some more."

ravo!" cried Mr. Tanker.

ow you're talking like a man, Monte," said Miss Georgia, patting on the shoulder. "That's the kind of talk I like to hear. Give the his chance. And give this little girl one too. That number about ng is mine from now on, eh?"

there you are," said Mr. Mortimer, smiling at Inigo. "And now do you say?"

is was where Inigo began. "I've a good deal to say," he announced, a highly creditable appearance of complete calm.

know." Mr. Mortimer waved a hand. Messrs. Pitsner, Tanker and smiled in concert. "Terms, of course. Don't you worry. The will be all right. They're going to surprise you."

Inigo grinned. "That's what we're going to talk about. I've got terms too. I hope they won't surprise you. But they might."

They all stared at him, and Miss Georgia pursed up her scarle and produced a droll little whistle. Then Mr. Mortimer looked a Pitsner, and Mr. Tanker looked at Mr. Porry. If one of the arm had suddenly made a remark, had perhaps pointed out that it wa ting rather tired of that room, they could hardly have been mo tonished. Inigo walked over to where Mr. Alfred Nott was still ex ing the manuscript music.

"I fancy this one," said Mr. Nott. "Here, ol' man, you're not t it away, are you?"

"For the time being," replied Inigo firmly, "I am." And he gat the sheets together and then put them in the small *attaché* case h brought with him. He did this with great deliberation, and rem himself that no man who could justifiably be called feeble would been able to achieve such calm and poise.

Somebody coughed. Then Miss Georgia, who was clearly enj the situation, suddenly let out a harsh scream of laughter. Ther a murmur of voices. Inigo turned and rejoined the group.

"I must say I don't quite——" Mr. Pitsner began.

Mr. Mortimer interrupted him. "Leave this to me, Pitsner," h "You're all right in this. Now then, Mr. Jollifant——"

"What about a drink?" cried Mr. Tanker jovially. "That's wh mean, isn't it, Monte? For God's sake, let's have a drink before any more talking."

"I'm agreeable," said Mr. Mortimer. "We'll run round and have at Robert. He ought to be having an inspiration about now. Co Mr. Jollifant. Bye-bye, Pitsner, that'll be all right."

As they filed out, Inigo was rewarded with a huge friendly g from the redoubtable Miss Georgia. "I don't know what you're pu she whispered, "but some of you nice boys from college have Nerve. You'd get away with murder." She squeezed his arm. freeze him a bit. It'll do Monte good."

But Inigo could only stammer vaguely in reply to this. Face Miss Georgia, he had no nerve. She terrified him.

III

rt proved to be a grave, white-coated American who stood behind
ktail bar in the glittering basement of one of the West End hotels.
did not know which hotel it was. He knew very little about these
lishments, and then everything had happened so quickly. Leaving
rs. Pitsner and Porry behind, the four of them had rushed down
ntered an enormous car; the car had shot them round several cor-
and after that he found himself looking at Robert. The entry of
rt upon the scene did not make for clarity and a steady progression
nts. After two of his cocktails, the very largest and strongest that
had ever tasted, Inigo found that the day tended to slip further
urther into unreality. He himself was all right, solidly there in the
and quite determined to do all that he had planned to do, but
hing else, however bright and noisy it might be, was at some re-
from himself and reality, all phantasmagoria. Throughout he
d that Mr. Monte Mortimer was a personage of great power and
nce, who had only to clap his hands and your name would be in
papers and on all the hoardings, but he did not feel any respect
m because, after all, Mr. Mortimer too was a figure in the phantas-
ria.

t is why Inigo, after being asked what the idea was, did not hesi-
speak out boldly. "You like these things I've written, don't you?"
d. "You want to use them, and you'd like me to write some more?"
at's it. And you're lucky, as I told you before. Hello, Tommy!
want to talk to you, but you'll have to wait. All right, make it
ay." These last remarks, of course, were not addressed to Inigo
some stranger who wanted to join them. The place was filling
people, and most of them seemed to be anxious to talk to Mr.
ner. "Yes, you're lucky."

doubt you're right, absolutely," said Inigo, speaking with great
ss and looking sternly at two people, a very large man and a very
woman, who threatened to break in. "But I don't care much about
In fact I don't give a damn."

at!" Mr. Mortimer was horrified.

t really—not a damn. If you don't mind my putting it that way.

I'm not trying to be offensive, you know, please understand that. H is this for me?" For two more glasses, charged with the sorceries o grave Robert, had suddenly appeared from nowhere.

"It is," replied Mr. Mortimer, a trifle grimly. Could this fant young man be drunk? The query, a hopeful one, was there in quick glance at the glass.

"I want you," Inigo continued, after smiling at Mr. Nott, who mated from a distance that the latest drink had been provided by "I want you to see a friend of mine, one of the girls in our concert pa

"Ah!" And Mr. Mortimer put a great deal of meaning into this si syllable.

"I don't want you to engage her, naturally," said Inigo with dig "You haven't seen her. But once you see her you'll want to give h part. She's a genius."

Mr. Mortimer smiled. Then he nodded to several people, presum important people, people with names and careers in the profession, p who would only be too glad if he would give them even the sma part. And then he smiled again.

"Genius," said Inigo again. "The real thing."

The other was paternal. "Don't you bother your head about concert party, my boy. You've done with that. In a month or you'll laugh when you think of it. You will."

"Because you've taken my songs, you mean?"

"That's right. You'll be too busy."

"Can't be done," said Inigo, who felt vaguely that this was a good business-like phrase. "Can't be done, absolutely. Those are my t You've got to have a look at this girl—'see her working' as they s *The Stage* advertisements. Otherwise, no songs. I don't want t vulgar—though I feel it's all in the part—but take it or leave it."

"But my dear chap," the great man protested, "it's absurd. It's all standing by your friends—done it myself—but who d'you think I Of course I know there's always a certain amount of new talent k ing about in the provinces—I've gone down and spotted a few n in my time—but really you can't expect me, Monte Mortimer, to g have a look at a girl in a concert party I never heard of, you can't e it, you can't really! No, damn it!"

f you saw this girl—her name's Susie Dean, by the way," Inigo ed, with a little thrill of pleasure, "you'd jump at her. Somebody will soon, I can tell you that. And it might as well be you."

r. Mortimer shook his head and smiled like one who pities innocent impressionable youth, ignorant as yet of this hard world.

his would not do for Inigo. "You never heard of these songs of before, did you? Well, this girl's better than those songs. And matter of fact there's a fellow too in the party, a light comedian and er, who's first-class too. This is no ordinary concert party, I can tell Hang it, I ought to know. This girl's worth fifty of that Georgia ian. Take my word for it. Why, if somebody had told you yester-about these songs of mine, you wouldn't have believed them."

'hat's all right," said Mr. Mortimer dubiously. "But now I've heard ongs."

nd tonight you'll see this girl," Inigo told him.

onight! You're crazy."

he place is Gatford."

never heard of it," Mr. Mortimer moaned. "What d'you call it? ord? My God! Tonight at Gatford! Oh, come now, you've had laugh—let's talk sense, let's get down to business."

have got down to it," Inigo pointed out. "I'm up to the neck in it, utely. No Gatford, no songs."

s blackmail, my dear chap, it really is. You can't dictate to me like You're cutting your own throat."

to that," Inigo told him, at once heartily and firmly, "I don't give in. Have another of Robert's potions?"

e must get a bit of food," said Mr. Mortimer. "I ordered a table You must lunch with me."

elighted! And, thank you. But I warn you," Inigo added, "I unbend. The more food and drink I have, the more iron goes ny will. Even now it's got a metallic sound."

ang on a minute, my boy," said Mr. Mortimer, darting Assyrian es to left and right. "Hello, Jeff! 'Lo, Milly! Yes, in a minute." off he went.

go found himself talking to Mr. Alfred Nott, who popped up as ly and quietly as a fish out of the sea. The place was very full now, and Robert and his assistants or acolytes were concocting and sl ing and pouring out and handing over their liquid fire-and-ice as as they could. Everybody talked at once, at full speed, and at the of his voice. Inigo was trying to tell Mr. Nott, who was a friendly l man, all about *The Good Companions,* but other people's conversat or, rather, monologues were for ever getting in the way. He was c pelled to learn that about twenty shows were rotten, their theatres of paper every night; that various gentlemen of the profession had b touched for tenners; that various ladies had said once and for all they were not going to have their salaries slashed like that and th Mr. Fenkel didn't like it he could do the other thing; that Queenie at her old game, grabbing all the fat; that it was as much as your was worth at the Pall Mall to get a laugh when Tommy Mawson wa

"Did you say you knew Jimmy Nunn?" roared Inigo.

"Know him well," replied Mr. Nott, in his wheezing voice. and Jimmy . . . panto in Burnley in nineteen—let me see—it must been ——"

"What?"

"It died standing, believe me," said a voice right in Inigo's ear.

He jumped and looked round. "What? I beg your pardon,' gasped.

"Granted," said the owner of the voice, with grave politeness. "I it died standing. The remark was not addressed to you."

"I know it wasn't, now," said Inigo. "I'm sorry."

"But for your information, I may say it referred to the act of Kr and Konley at the New York Palace," the man continued bitterly. ' act died standing and now they're through with Big Time. Isn't th Oby?"

"I'll say it is," said a voice from the other side.

"Thanks very much," said Inigo. He did not understand what were talking about, but by this time it did not matter. This wa the ordinary sane world.

"Laugh," cried Mr. Nott, who was apparently just finishing a "I thought I should never stop for weeks. You oughter seen hin man." And he laughed himself, and so Inigo laughed too, havin doubt at all that it had been very funny indeed.

hen Mr. Mortimer arrived again, with various people swarming and ng in his wake, and said it was time they had a bit of food, and led way out of Robert's domain into a much larger room, more glitter- and noisier still, a medley of little tables and hurrying waiters and ping corks and *Madame Butterfly* with full tremolo effects. Mr. t went with them, and then Miss Georgia appeared again, bringing 1 her Mr. Tanker and two other people whose names Inigo never ght, a Semitic youth with waved hair and a small dark girl with the test face and reddest lips Inigo had ever seen. The moment they had down, waiters descended upon them with oysters and caviare and npagne and other things that Inigo ate and drank in a dim sort of . Everybody talked at once, and Miss Georgia and Mr. Tanker, Semitic youth and the small dark girl, all shouted to friends of theirs ther tables, and sometimes people stopped at the table because they t had to tell you" and then Miss Georgia or the Semitic youth "just to tell" them something back, so that it was like lunching in a ted and gilded pandemonium. Inigo, however, even when the npagne was still bubbling inside him, kept hold of the thread that guided him from the real world into this sumptuous craziness, and gh Mr. Mortimer affected the utmost incredulity and dismay, Inigo on and only repeated his "terms," a word he liked to bring out as 1 as possible because he felt it was a word of power. Mr. Mortimer n looking at him with increasing respect. He condescended to ask tions, to which Inigo bellowed back (you had to bellow) the most usiastic replies. It was obvious that the great man was weakening. referred pointedly to the afternoon train he was catching, back atford. The songs would be returning on that train too. Though urse they might come up to London again, those songs, quite soon. et me a boy," said Mr. Mortimer to a waiter. Though the lunch still going on, he took Inigo to one side, away from the table. A man does not announce a decision when he is barely eighteen s from a mixed grill. "I'll do it," he said impressively. "It wrecks est of this day, but I can fix that. Tell me where I've got to go don't forget to see I've got a decent seat. Better wire now. I can ou down myself in my car. No, I can't—shan't get down till about . How far is this place? About a hundred miles or so, eh? Do it under three hours and get back sometime tonight. You don't th so? You don't know my car, my boy. I'll eat it." And when the p boy arrived, he gave him instructions and messages innumerable, among them was one from Inigo, a wire to the Gatford Hippodrom reserve one stall. The great Monte Mortimer would see *The G Companions.* Inigo did not say so in his wire; he sang it softly triumphantly in his heart. And all the lights in the place seeme grow brighter; the waiters suddenly began bringing nectar and brosia; the tables were crowded with the drollest good fellows and prettiest women in London, such laughter, such wit; and the orch stopped making an irritating noise and decided to play the most delic little tunes, to fiddle you into a happy trance.

"I should like to ask you a question," said Inigo carefully, whe was taking leave of Mr. Mortimer. "You're a man of experience, know the world. Do you honestly think I can be described as feeb

"As what?"

"Feeble is the word."

"I could call you many things," said Mr. Mortimer, perhaps a grimly. "You're a young man who could be called many things. not feeble. If you're feeble, most of the young men who work for have been dead a long time. I don't know what you're like at pu out the teeth of sharks, but in the ordinary way, just doing the ordi sort of things, such as making a very busy and quite well-known th rical producer go across England to see a pierrot show he's never h of before, you're—er—well, you're not feeble. And—er——" he pa artfully.

"Well?"

"You can tell her that from me. And that's where I get one in, I? Thought so. See you tonight then, and my God, if this girl of y is a frost, you'll hear something from me. And, don't forget, numbers of yours have got to go with a bang. I'm banking on t not the girl. Bye-bye."

Inigo caught the 3.15. It sent him to sleep and then wakened hi Birmingham. The train from Birmingham to Gatford was cro with young men who all seemed far more excited than Inigo was, th they had only been to a football match, whereas he had been—

ere had he been? Oh, he didn't know, it was all so absurd. Per- s on the borders of a dream—by train, and at a reduced fare, namely ngle fare and a third for the double journey—to a Charing Cross d that might easily have begun swelling and quivering like a bubble. ler and Hunterman, Pitsner and Porry—the Anthropophagi and men ose heads do grow beneath their shoulders. Gatford station, however, trived to hint that it knew what was going on in his own head. ff and nonsense!" it said, platforms, porters, kiosks, and all.

IV

ie's birthday tea-party, held in a large upstairs room in Miss Trant's el, was just finishing when Inigo arrived. There were signs that Morton Mitcham was about to make a speech over the ruins of the t. Inigo, a little dazed and breathless, stammered something. Susie ked suddenly frozen; not a glimmer of welcome on her face. Miss mie Potter was not there because she had not been invited. But y Jerningham was not there, either, though Inigo knew that he had n invited. All the others were present and were now looking at him roachfully. No one knew where he had been.

Nay, Inigo," said Mr. Oakroyd, who liked to speak his mind on all sions, "this is no time to turn up, lad. I thowt you'd ha' been t'first e, I did an' all."

That's right," said Joe, with that complacent want of tact which made s. Joe, even yet, despair of him. "Where in the name of goodness e you been to, young feller? We want an apology from you."

Oh, shut up, Joe," cried Susie. "We don't want anything of the d. It doesn't matter. What were you saying, Jimmy?"

I'm awfully sorry, Susie," said Inigo. "You see——"

It doesn't matter," she replied, coldly and wearily, and then she looked immy as if it were a pleasure to see a real human being.

nigo sat down, and though he knew his triumph was at hand, he ld not help wishing that Mr. Monte Mortimer was waiting outside. ey all began talking again, and he felt out of it. "Where's Jerning- n?" he asked finally.

Couldn't come, he said," replied Mrs. Joe, in a whisper that carried her than any ordinary tone. "He sent a note and a present—very

nice, too—I mean the present—a box of handkerchiefs, all in good tas
and very acceptable, upon my word, I was surprised. That young m
is a Mystery to me, and I don't believe in making them—mysteri
you know. If he'd come and brought nothing, that wouldn't have su
prised me. If he'd brought his present himself, that wouldn't have su
prised me, either. But not coming himself and yet sending such a ni
present, now that is surprising. He's a Mystery."

But Inigo was not listening. He did not care whether Jerry Jernin
ham was a mystery or not. He was busy cursing himself because he h
forgotten Susie's present. He had meant to buy it in London. Th
had all given Susie something—he could see the little parcels on the ta
—only he had forgotten. True, there was Mr. Monte Mortimer, w
was really a large gift, but that was not the same thing. Here was Su
twenty-one, never to be twenty-one again, though new solar syste
should arise and new planets dawn in the blue, and he had not be
here to wish her many happy returns and hand over something gl
ously sumptuous and see her look at it, eager, excited, happy. She
not look a bit excited and happy now. Had her birthday party be
a frost? Damn Felder and Hunterman and Monte Mortimer!
ought not to have bothered about them. And what did Jerningha
the little bounder, mean by not turning up, merely sending some sniv
ling handkerchiefs?

"Well, Miss Trant, boys and girls," said Jimmy, rising, "time to go,
you ask me. We'll wish Susie all the good luck she deserves—and go
health, that's a great thing in the profession, I give you my word—af
the show tonight. We ought to go and have bit of a rest. It's a
night tonight, house booked right up, and all for Susie here. Gatfor
going to get the show of its life tonight, I say, so we'd better take
easy for an hour or so before we start. That's all right, isn't it, Susi

Susie nodded, smiling at him but not too cheerfully. They all drif
away from the table. There was a movement towards the door. Su
began gathering up her little packages. This was Inigo's opportuni

"Look here, Susie, I'm awfully sorry," he began.

"It doesn't matter," she said, and turned away. The others were goi
now.

This would not do at all. He grabbed hold of her wrist. "I'm awfu

y I couldn't get here in time," he added quickly, "and I've gone and
otten your present too. No, you must listen, you must."

don't want to hear anything about it. Let me go."

won't until you've heard what I have to say. You see, I had to go
to London today ——"

London!" There was a quick change of tone.

Yes, London. I didn't tell anybody I was going. I had to see Felder
Hunterman, the music people ——"

nigo, your songs! They've been hearing them. Have they taken
n? Do tell me, quick!" She was excited enough now, and all her
rness was for him and his songs; she was not thinking about her-
at all. And this was a wonderful moment for him. He had some-
s thought she was selfish, and many a time, long after that day, he
to think so again, but the recollection of that moment in the hotel
Gatford always drove the thought out of his head.

They want them all right," he began slowly.

Oh, go on, go on. You're so *slow*. Tell me all about it quick. If
don't, I shall think you're feeble again."

Well, you see, that man Monte Mortimer heard them too and wants
n for a new revue of his."

nigo!" She gave a little scream of delight. Then her face fell.
u're pulling my leg. You never saw Monte Mortimer."

did, I tell you, Susie." And he told her what had happened in Mr.
ner's room. She listened, breathless.

You're made, my dear," she cried. "You'll be rolling soon. Marvel-
! I am glad. And now the poor old *Good Companions* are busted.
they are—bound to be." Then, after a pause: "But I'll tell you
ght, I hate to think of Ethel Georgia singing those numbers. You
ht to have told him about me," she added wistfully.

did, woman, I did," roared Inigo in triumph. "I told him about
ing else."

You didn't, did you? Did he say anything? Laugh, I suppose?"

Laugh be blowed! I'd have given him laugh. What he said doesn't
ter. The point is he's coming to the show tonight."

What!" This time it was a scream. She shook him hard. "Inigo,
't be so daft. He's not coming here."

"He's coming here to see the show tonight," he repeated with g deliberation and emphasis. "As a matter of fact he's coming to see y

"Monte Mortimer!"

"The great chief himself—if he is a great chief."

"But how?—why?—I mean, how did you do it? Oh, I don't bel it."

"I just told him to come down, and he's coming down. I've reser a seat for him. I may be feeble, but when I start——"

"Oh, shut up about being feeble! I never meant it anyhow. Let think a minute. No, I can't think. Oh, I shall be all in bits. thought about something like this happening so many times that I can't bear it. I feel funny already. I shall make a mess of it."

Inigo was alarmed. "Perhaps I ought not to have told you."

"Of course you ought, silly. I'd never have forgiven you if you ha I shall be all right when the time comes. If I'm not, then I'm no g Gosh, what a chance!" She went twirling away, then just as sudd came back to him, looking thoughtful. "Suppose he doesn't like That'll be a ghastly wash-out, won't it?"

"He'll like you all right," said Inigo. "If he doesn't, he's a fath absolutely. And he won't get any songs of mine. Under which k Besonian, speak or die! That's what I shall say to him."

"Darling! But look here, Inigo, I'm not going to let you tie th songs of yours to me like that——"

"Listen to me. Never mind about that." He caught hold of her ha "I'm sorry I couldn't get back sooner for your party——"

"Don't rub it in. I couldn't help it being furious, could I? You ou to have told me what you were going to do. Though it's more exci like this, I must say, Inigo."

"That's the point. If nothing had happened, you'd have been di pointed and your birthday would have been mucked up, absolut As it is, I forgot your present——"

"You didn't. The great Monte's my present. Marvellous prese

"And I never wished you anything. It isn't too late, is it? M happy returns of the day, Susie."

"Thank you." She said this quietly, demurely. But then, wit glorious rush: "Oh—I'm an idiot—but I'm so happy. Inigo, you ar ling." And her arms were about his neck and she had kissed him, in a flash.

For a minute or two he held her there. No, not for a minute or two. ese were not minutes, to be briskly ticked away by the marble clock the mantelpiece and then lost for ever; the world of Time was far ow, wrecked, a darkening ruin, forgotten; he had burst through into at enchanted upper air where suns and moons rise, stand still, and fall the least whisper of the spirit. Let us leave him there. We must member that he was a romantic and extravagant youth and very much love—a young ass. Nor must we forget that such asses do have such oments. Isis still appears to them as she once appeared to that Golden s of the fable, and they still feed upon her roses and are transfigured.

Chapter Four

A BENEFIT PERFORMANCE

I

THE last time we were actually present when *The Good Compani* began a performance was on a Saturday night, the first real Ni they had, at Sandybay, months ago. That was a tremendous occasi —or so it seemed then—but it was nothing to this, a Saturday night the Gatford Hippodrome. Susie's birthday, Susie's benefit, with Monte Mortimer due to arrive almost any time, and every seat in t house taken—even the box. Yes, the Gatford Hippodrome had a b —not four boxes, not two boxes, but one solitary box. Its curtains w rather dingy, and it was difficult to make out whether its four lit chairs were gilded or not, but nevertheless it was a proper box, ready receive any great personage visiting the town who expressed a wish attend a performance at the Hippodrome. And of course it could booked, in the ordinary way. But as great personages rarely visited t Hippodrome and other people preferred to sit in comfort, this box w not often occupied, though professional friends of the manager wou occasionally accept a seat in it for an odd hour. But now, on this gr night, it had been taken. Nobody knew who had taken it, or at le nobody admitted having any knowledge. Thus, Jerry Jerningham mig possibly have known something about it. He was not asked, part because he was not there to be asked until there was barely time f him to change and make up for the opening chorus, and then aga because no one imagined he would know anything about it. Mrs. J might have asked him, because she was more pleased, excited, and cu ous about that box than anybody else. In her opinion, the box ga Tone to the whole evening. She looked forward to catching the glea of a white dress front, to hurling a good chest note at a possible diamo tiara. And then again, as she pointed out, with a box you never nev w; anybody might be in the box, and anything—a solid contract for rnemouth, for example—might come out of it. She was interested, ted, and made no secret of the fact. Perhaps the prophetic instinct working in the depths of her mind—all conscientious contraltos, r all, sound prophetic—for it must be admitted that that box was ortant.

ndeed, everything is important now. The sands are running out, so every grain has some significance.

hat is why we must be there in time to see the curtain rise. We e done it before, but we must do it again because this is the last time curtain will rise on *The Good Companions*. There will never be ther opening chorus for them all after this one. That is what none hem knows, not even Mrs. Joe, who has the deep notes of Cassandra elf. They are all eager to make this night a success, and the thought he packed house recurs to them continually, warming them like e. But most of them are still wondering about things. Miss Trant, ing a word here, a word there, behind the scenes, still wonders what is to do about it all, and now and then remembers the figure of a n in a car, a man so like the ghost that has long haunted the dim idors of her mind. The older players are still wondering about the ire, that Bournemouth offer. Inigo and Susie are troubled by thoughts Mr. Monte Mortimer. Jerry Jerningham obviously has concerns of own, which he keeps to himself. Even Miss Mamie Potter keeps ing herself what these people propose to do and whether she had er stick to them through the summer and then take a chance in town he autumn. And Mr. Oakroyd wonders what is going to happen to n, and what is happening in Canada, and what is happening in Brudsford, for no news has trickled through from Ogden Street for some e. There they are then, all as eager and excited as you please but busy wondering and pondering and planning a little. And not one them guesses that this is the last time they will troop on together, t their semicircle is about to be broken for ever, that already the vder has been heaped and the train set and fired.

hey have crowded in from Mundley and Stort as well as from Gatd itself, and many of them have seen the show before and know who ie is and why she is having a benefit. Mechanics, fitters, electricians,

clerks and cashiers from the motor works, with their wives and swe
hearts; typists and milliners and elementary-school teachers; wom
who might be anybody's wife or nobody's; men who might at a
moment be awarded a medal or given five years' penal servitude, w
might be heading for the town council or the gutter; lads who gape a
nudge one another and guffaw; girls who wriggle their shoulders, sl
their companions, and giggle; quiet girls whose lives are as yet only
vague dream; decent young men who slip in and out of the works a
their lodgings, always near a crowd and yet as lonely as Crusos; jov
middle-aged fellows who earn good money and can eat anything, a
their tired wives, who have been fighting, right up to six o'clock th
very evening, the week's long battle for cleanliness and respectabilit
wistful virgins who are eager to feast their eyes on the face of Jer
Jerningham, and amourous gentlemen who have a fancy for Miss Mam
Potter's legs; people who ought to be in hospital, people who oug
to be in prison, people who ought to be attending the Victoria Str
Wesleyan Chapel concert, the Triangle Girl Guides Rally, the debate
the Mundley Y. M. C. A., the Gatford Cycling Club Whist Drive, peop
who ought to be helping their father in the shop, people who ought
be in the Blessed Isles, so long and hard have they laboured in th
unblessed island; they are all here, staring, chattering, eating chocolat
reading football scores in the paper, turning over their programm
And now, just when they are all tired of amusing themselves, out go t
lights above and up come the footlights illuminating the lower folds
the curtain in the old enchanting way. Is the curtain going up no
No, they will play something first; they always do. There it go
Rumty-dee-tidee-dee, Rumty-dee-tidee. Some of the audience know th
tune. It is a song called *Slippin' round the Corner,* and that good-loo
ing young fellow, who dances, sings it. Is-ern-tit lovely? And at th
moment, as it comes softly twirling through the magically lighted cu
tain, the mischievous lilt of it working like leaven in the dark mass
the audience, it is lovely indeed, a rhapsody of love and idleness, ne
from another and brighter world than this in which we portion out o
wages. It dances Gatford clean away; the streets, the factories and sho
the long rows of houses, the trams and lorries, the ugly little chapels an
the furtive pubs, they tremble a little, they sway, they rock violentl

then off they go, jogging away into nothing, slipping for ever round
e vast unimaginable corner. A little louder now, as if in triumph.
thing remains but clean earth and a blue spangle of stars, and the
and the beat and the *Rumty-dee-tidee* pulsating in the velvet dark-
s. Louder still now, more triumphant. And up it comes, shaped and
ured anew by the sorcery of the flying crotchets and quavers, this
er Gatford, shining and fair, a suburb of Old Cockayne, with foun-
s spouting the alternate black and gold of Guiness and Bass, gold-
e and honey-dew heaped in the streets, arcades of meat and pudding
e to a turn, silk stockings and jumpers to be picked where you like,
ces round every corner and a prize for everybody, goals to be scored
ny hour of the day, girls like laughing and passionate queens, boys
would love you for ever and always in evening dress, and children,
rms of them, rosy and fat, with never a white drawn face or a
ted limb, scampering everywhere, running and tumbling out of the
py houses, out of the depths of memory, out of the very grave. . . .
h, that was good, that was. Took you back, took you out of your-
, took you somewhere, you didn't know where. It deserves a clap.
d tonight it's getting one. The piano by itself now. The curtain's
g up. There they are, singing away, pretty as a picture. Give them
ther good clap. The two girls look lovely, don't they? You can't
that other one a girl; she's getting on, she is; but she's a fine singer
all that, a real good turn. But the two girls look lovely. That's
new one, the one in the blue. But the other's the one, her in the red,
e Dean. It's her that's having the benefit. Make a cat laugh, the
she takes people off, but she's nice and pretty too. Look at her
ling. That red dress just suits her, dark eyes and dark hair. Well-
le too, that girl. She'll be married though, they always are. If she
, she'll be marrying that nice-looking boy, Jerry they call him. Oh,
a good turn. Just watch his feet. And there's the comic, the little
at the end, twisting his face about, Jimmy Nunn. He'll come on
postman soon—and laugh, he'd make you die laughing! That tall
—no, the very long thin man, him with the eyebrows—he plays the
jo and then he does conjuring. They say he's played before the King
Queen or something like that. Quite a comic too, in his way, when
conjuring. That other one, with the big shoulders on him, is a singer.

He usually starts them off. That's right: "Courtney Brundit will si Number Twenty-seven on the programme." That's him. And th young fellow at the piano can play all right, my words he can! It's gift to be able to play like that. They say he's just married that ne one, but of course you can't believe everything you hear.

The curtain is up, the show has begun. It is time we left the audien and went behind the scenes. We shall never find our way there agai after this night.

II

The trouble began when Joe was singing, at the very opening of th programme. It was a cloud no larger than a man's hand, but there was. As usual, Joe was giving his audience, whom he apparent imagined to be a company of would-be navigators, some advice co cerning the Deep, the Moi-oi-oighty Dee-ee-eep. Just as he was impl ing them, for the fourth or fifth time, to Beeware (many Brave Hear being asleep in this Deep), a horribly raucous and penetrating voice to him to "pur a sock in it." It came, this voice, from the back of t pit, which was the cheapest part of the house, there being no galle And it raised a loud and jeering laugh from that quarter, though t rest of the audience immediately made shushing noises. Joe hims seemed to pay no attention to this voice; he went on with his son but Inigo at the piano noticed that his great fists were clenched and th certain veins in his forehead were swelling ominously. Joe, it was cle was very annoyed, as he had every right to be. Besides, it was not t first time that voice had jeered at them. It had been heard one or tw nights before.

When Joe had finished his first song, he was warmly applauded, t audience—bless them!—being as usual all the more enthusiastic becau some of their number had been rude enough to interrupt. But fro that same place at the back there came boos and groans and ironic che and they were so prolonged that they outlasted the applause. Joe w furious. "Bloody swine!" he muttered to Inigo, across the pian "They're at it again."

"Ladies and gentlemen," he cried, "by special request—*The Trum eter.*"

ıurr up!" the voice jeered, before anybody else could make a sound. me people laughed. The remainder indignantly shushed again and clapped.

the gentleman at the back doesn't shut up," roared Joe, his honest nflamed even through the make-up, "he'll be soon made to shut up."

eady, Joe boy, steady!" whispered Jimmy, who was sitting just id him. Most of the others had left the stage, as they usually did ıg an individual act.

e gentleman at the back and his friends signified their contempt his threat, but other people in the audience, not having paid their y to listen to the town roughs, welcomed it. "Turn him out," they . For a minute or two there was quite an uproar in the place. rimly waited until there was quiet again, and then began his series parently idiotic questions to a trumpeter.

anwhile, Mrs. Joe, in the wings, was very agitated indeed. "I'm nced now," she declared, "that it's all a put-up affair. Before, I 't, though I had my suspicions. I know what you're going to say, and you, Miss Trant, that some pros always think it's a put-up if there's ever a bit of booing or stamping. And so they do, and silly too I call it. But there's a Limit."

's disgusting," said Miss Trant, "and we've certainly had more than hare of it this week."

rhaps it'll stop soon," said Susie hopefully, still busy with thoughts r. Monte Mortimer. "They may settle down when the show's got ."

nd they may not," retorted Mrs. Joe, who perhaps did not like the estion that the show had not got going when her husband was actu- on the stage. "It sounds bad to me, and put-up. And whatever those people in the box think! Booking it specially like that and ng in evening dress and then hearing such—such—Devilry!" For were people in the box now, and Mrs. Joe had caught sight of a shirt front and a bare arm on the ledge.

ell, if there's any more of it," Miss Trant announced with decision, going to have them turned out. It's vile and unpardonable, and ıot going to have it."

"If they spoil it for me tonight," Susie said fiercely, "I'll—I'll kill th the beasts."

"Don't say that, my dear," said Mrs. Joe. "And if there's to be thing of that sort, Joe will do it. Just listen to that! The temper be in now, it won't bear thinking of. It'll take me all my time to him quiet. You've no idea what Joe's like when he's thorou roused," she added, with a droll mingling of shame and pride. "Ta peep at him now, my dear. He's fairly bursting."

Miss Mamie Potter strolled up. She was on next. "I say," she turning her round features from one to the other of them, "what's They're not giving out the bird, are they? If they're starting that, through. I shall just walk off. I will. I can't stand it."

"If there is any trouble while you are on, Miss Potter," Miss Trant her, "don't take any notice of it. I'll have it stopped somehow or o if I've to go and do it myself."

"That's all right," replied Mamie dubiously, "but I'm not used to

"Neither are we," Susie put in, like lightning. "And I'll tell something for your own good. Monte Mortimer's going to be in tonight."

"Monte Mortimer! The big revue man! That's likely, isn't it? heard those yarns before, Miss Dean," Mamie scoffed.

"All right then, don't believe me." And then, in reply to the wo ing glances of the other two, she went on: "It's true. Inigo went town today, saw him, and persuaded him to come and see us toni

"Well, I never did," Mrs. Joe gasped. "Not that he's any use t —or Joe, of course. But it's your Chance, Susie. What did I tell only the other day? You see, you never know."

"I say, d'you mean it?" Miss Potter was apparently convinced "Where's he sitting? Is he here now?"

"Fourth row of the stalls," Susie replied shortly. "I know be Inigo showed me the seat before we started. He's not come yet, he's coming all right. Inigo got a wire after he had started."

"And my God, I've got to go on now. That's a nice trick, anyh cried Miss Potter, looking angrily at Susie. "Why didn't you tel before?"

"Because I hadn't a chance. Nobody's trying to crab you. He'l ity of you before the night's out. Lord, listen to that! Joe'll be ous."

e was. They were applauding him loudly enough, but you could nly hear the catcalls and booing from the back.

ear that?" he growled, as he joined them, and Miss Potter, looking uneasy, got ready to take his place. "There's somebody at the back e'ud get such a pug in the lug——"

t's bad and I don't doubt it's deliberate, put-up," his wife intered, putting a hand on his arm, "but don't let's have vulgarities. can be ladies and gentlemen, I say, even if they can't."

nd I say they'd get such a pug in the lug if I could get at 'em. y'd better look out, that lot. I've a good mind to go and stand e when some of you are on, and keep 'em quiet one way or the r."

ou've a good mind to do nothing of the sort," cried Mrs. Joe indigtly. "Starting bother like that, Joe! You don't know how it might end up. And Susie here with such a Chance!"

hance?"

f a Lifetime," she told him, and then hastily explained why this a night of nights.

iss Mamie Potter was not faring any better than Joe. Indeed, it worse for her. She had not much of a voice, and very soon this was ted out to her by the back of the pit. By the time she had struggled ugh to the end of one feeble little song, Jimmy signalled to her not ing any more but to do her dance and then finish the act. It is not to interrupt a dance but the roughs at the back did what they ld. Miss Potter really could dance, and her beautiful flashing legs voked a fine outburst of applause, but still the row at the back could be drowned. And the audience was growing restless.

mmy dashed off while Miss Potter was taking her call. "We'll do Shopping concerted number next," he cried. "Must do something y. Can't you tell them to stop that row, Miss Trant, please?"

'm going to, now," she replied. And she went, there and then. manager was not to be found anywhere in the building, and nobody eared to know where he was. There were only two men attendants the auditorium, and neither of these was young, strong, and determined. The man in the pit, a decrepit fellow, protested that he doing his best to stop the constant interruptions. "But they're a t lot, Miss," he whispered. "I give you my word. Don't know w they're doing here at all, I don't."

"Send out for a policeman," she said.

"Ought to be a bobby about," he replied doubtfully. "Usually l in, but don't seem to have come this way tonight. However, there's at the corner could look in, dare say. Keep 'em quiet, p'raps, if saw him."

Five minutes later, a policeman arrived and stood just behind noisy fellows, after letting them know, by a familiar "Now then, th Give order!" that the Law itself in all its blue and silver majesty taking charge. It happened though that there was little need of h The concerted item they were giving now was a noisy, rollicking a that offered great scope to Susie and Jimmy for droll by-play. And t had hardly begun singing the first verse, which was a mere excuse the drolleries that came after, when Susie remarked a stir in front. S one had just arrived, was finding his place in the fourth row, the seat on the left of the gangway. It must be—could only be—the g Monte Mortimer. Susie flashed a glance at Inigo, who lifted an brow in reply. For a minute or two, she felt horrible, wobbly on legs and hot and dry in the mouth; everything went out of her h words, business, everything; and she felt she could never be amusing the stage again. Then a huge friendly laugh came over the footli to her from the audience, tickled by some bit of business she had g through quite mechanically. And then all her nervousness fell a from her, leaving her excited somewhere inside but feeling clear, mas ful, full of wonderful tricks. She hurled herself into the little sc became a laughing whirlwind of fun. She acted everybody, Jimmy cluded, clean off the stage. All the silly shopgirls she had ever seen, girls who sniffed, the girls who were short, sagging, and wistful, girls who were tall, haughty, and spoke through their noses, the g who knew nothing and the girls who knew everything, were vivi present in her mind, and in a happy fury of inspiration she brought the lot, created and destroyed them in a few seconds. The audie laughed; they roared; they leapt at her. Even those people in the bo who were those people in the box?—seemed to be laughing, lean- orward; and once she thought she heard a voice she knew. As for Monte Mortimer, she could not see him and did not know what happening to him; but if he did not like this, he could do the other g.

ust keep it going now," cried Jimmy, as they bustled off. "You , Jerry. Keep 'em going, boy. Show 'em what you can do."

nd Jerry did. He slipped round the corner for them. While he it, there was nothing there but a good little tune, but once he began ing it was soon packed with meanings that had escaped both words music. His long graceful legs and twinkling witty feet held the d in thrall. When finally he appeared to hurl away the last shreds estraint, capering crazily and yet still keeping it all as deft and neat urgery, and Inigo tossing his lock of hair over the piano was joined immy with his drums, Mitcham with his banjo, and the others as us, the house rose at him. A last double kick—*pom-pom*—and he standing there, glittering a little and gasping, smiling at them. y pounded and thundered their approval. He bowed, flashed a smil- glance at the box, bowed again, then retired. Back he had to come, for another delicious five minutes his feet told them how amusing was. Another storm, and this time the girl attendant who looked r the stalls came forward and handed up some small parcels, one which apparently demanded another smiling glance at the box, to nothing of innumerable bows to the rest of the house. The others he wings, clapping too, caught a glimpse of a gold cigarette case. other tributes were boxes of cigarettes and chocolates, customary rings on the altar of hopeless passion. But that cigarette case did suggest Gatford. Even the most devoted typist or shopgirl could have given him that lovely glittering thing. Jerry, however, who eared to be becoming more mysterious every minute, rushed down his dressing-room, and offered no explanations.

t had been arranged that Susie should go on next. She had begged my, whose original programme was now in ruins, for the next gle act—"while the going was good," she said—and as this was her ht, he could not refuse.

hey clapped when they heard her name announced, and clapped

still harder, cheered even, when she actually appeared. She gave th
with a wealth of by-play, that song of Inigo's about going home,
they loved every word and note and gesture of it all. Most of t
had seen her before. She was the youngest, a favourite, and this
her night, so that there was every excuse for giving her a great recept
But if they had never set eyes on her before, it would have been
the same. This was indeed her night. She was entertaining them
at a birthday party. They were all old friends together, it seemed,
only because she happened to be the prettiest and gayest girl there,
was in the limelight and they were staring and listening in the d
That first tight "Now or never" feeling had left her long ago; she kn
the great Monte was there, but she no longer bothered her head ab
him; and she carried everything before her, swept everything dull
heavy clean out of the world, with her gigantic rush of high spi
Inigo, vamping idly at the piano, was amazed, almost frightened. T
was Susie, everything—the adorable everything he knew so well—
there, but she was larger and brighter than life. The girl herself
lost in this public Susie, this tremendous Susie-for-everybody, who
so obviously ready to take possession of any stage, any audience,
charge into the very centre of that daft wonderland of the morning
early afternoon, that world of vast electric signs and photographers
interviewers and press agents and enormous cars and expensive lunc
for everybody in glittering noisy rooms. All of it seemed hers now
right. She had only to lift a finger and they would all be gather
round her and up would go the spangled lights, spelling her name
the crazed empyrean of Shaftesbury Avenue. In a flash he saw e
the formidable Ethel Georgia slinking away, a little faded, tired, wh
she appeared. It seemed to him that that wonderlandish world
closing round her already. He did not know whether he liked it
not. Something hurt, though there was sweetness in the wound. O
moment he felt he wanted to stop playing, to seize her by the arm a
rush her away into the dark, just to sit in a tram with her, take her ba
to dingy lodgings, drop into the old round of Sunday trains and c
sandwiches and little halls and companionable shabbiness. The n
moment he wanted to go on and on, to play and play until she h
laughed and pirouetted herself into being everything she thought

ted to be, and all the good things were heaped before her, and he —well, dodging about somewhere in the background, looking on e spectacle of her gigantic, her immortal happiness. But then again t what then? Oh, he didn't know. He seemed to have been up doing for several weeks without a break of comforting brute sense-ess, good old sleep. He must be tired. But he didn't feel tired, he drunk, a trifle mad. *Tiddly-iddly-om-pom, tiddly-iddly-om.* Quite , in fact—absolutely. *Pom-pom.*

sie gave one encore, she gave two encores, and even then the riot not subdued. There were some little parcels for her too, and some ers, including a bouquet—a real Grand Opera sort of bouquet, some-g undreamed of in the pierrot world—that was handed down from mysterious box. She tried to say something, but was far too excited breathless. Jimmy hustled the others on for a concerted number left her happy and gasping in the wings, where she received the gratulations of Mr. Oakroyd.

ought to go and sit down and be quiet in the dressing-room, Jess ' Susie told him, "but I just can't. Look at this. Isn't it sweet? —I'm nearly bursting. What a night!"

Champion!" cried Mr. Oakroyd, rising to heights of enthusiasm lly known in Bruddersford. "Eh, that were a right treat, Soos lass. they tell me ther's one o' t'big men o' the the-ater business in use."

There is," cried Susie. "And I expect him to come round any minute say, 'Miss Dean, I've been looking for you for years. Open a week Tuesday at two hundred and fifty pounds a week. If that's not ugh, let me know.' Something like that. What d'you say?" But re he could say anything, she waltzed him round a few times.

So that's it, is it?" he said, when she had let him go. "And what ut poor owd *Good Companions?* We'll nivver see you ner more, ess we go up on a day trip and pay to go in. Never you mind, Soos ," he went on, when it appeared she was about to break in, "you look r yersen and if yon feller does offer you ten pound a week to go up London or owt like that, tak' it on. So long as there's nowt shameless ut it, coming on naked and suchlike. You'll ha' to mind there, I'm thinking, for they're a bit of a foul lot i' London, they tell me. B it's decent, tak' it. Eh, I'd right miss you if you went, I woul all ——"

"Darling!" cried Susie, who had been ready to laugh and cry a once for some time, and now felt more like it than ever. She took of his arm and squeezed it hard. "I think you're marvellous, Jess and I'd miss you too. Let's run away to Canada together, shall

"Eh"—a very long-drawn-out one this time—"ther's nowt I'd like ter. We would have a do." He stopped for a minute to contem rapturously the "do" they would have, before returning to the wor fact. "But listen here. Never you mind about *t'Good Compan* Tak' what's offered if yer can benefit yersen. 'Cos ther's bound to bust-up i' t'party afore so long. Summat's going to happen, I can it coming. Ay, you can laugh, but I've a right knack that way. W t'United won t'Cup, I said they would right from t'start that year, they all laughed at me at t'mill, but I wer right. An' I'll tell another thing," he added, taking breath.

"Go on, Mr. Old Moore," she said, laughing at him.

"I thowt ther wer going to be a right bit o' bother here tonight. I'm not so certain it's all ower yet, either."

"You mean that lot at the back?"

"That's right. I've had a look at 'em and wer talking to t'owd that looks after t'pit, an' yon lot's game for owt. Ther's summat w there, let me tell yer. I can't mak' it out at all, I can't. Here, Jim wanting you to join in, afore t'interval."

So Susie went on again and helped to bring about a rousing cur Jimmy had cut the first half, perhaps in the hope that the roughs at back of the pit would clear out at the interval and not come back, tho for the last half-hour or more they had not made a sound. When house lights went up, after the curtain had fallen, Inigo, peeping thro with the excited Susie, had just time to see Mr. Monte Mortimer lea his seat. Was he coming round to see them? Or was he slipping for a drink? As the minutes passed and he did not appear, Inigo c to the conclusion that Monte had wanted a drink, a cheerful conclu compared with Susie's, which was that he retired for good and all st. Just before it was time to begin again, however, they saw him in his seat, and Susie was able to have a peep at his distinguished rian features.

e doesn't look bad," she remarked. "I'd like to scream at him l, what about it?' Wonder what he's thinking. Doesn't look as if thinking anything. Look, he's yawning. Oh, don't yawn. Fancy ng here and yawning!"

amn cheek, I call it," said Inigo. "He's probably eaten too much. ad enough lunch for five, and I'll bet he's been eating and drink- ever since."

ig! No, I won't say that. You never know, he might sort of— d'you call it?—know what I'm saying. Please, Mr. Mortimer, I a nice fat engagement. Thank you. Oh, this is awful! I feel If he doesn't do anything about it, everything's spoilt, isn't it? an it'll be ghastly just going on in the old way. I wish it was time egin again. I'm not going to look at him any more. There's no- in that box now. I wonder who they are. Marvellous bouquet gave me, and no name on it at all. It's a very handsome young ionaire—not too young, you know, not like you, Inigo—who's fallen lly in love with me. Hello, here we are."

Well," said Jimmy, beaming at them all, "I thought we were in for ne time ——"

Thought somebody else was," growled Joe. "Just let me catch one hem fellows, that's all ——"

Those fellows, Joe, not them fellows," his wife told him. "And you'll nothing of the kind."

It's all right now, though," Jimmy continued. "Got 'em all going in at style."

A riot," Mr. Morton Mitcham observed gravely.

nd a riot it proved to be, though not the kind of riot mentioned in columns of *The Stage*. When the lights went down again, all the ple in the pit were back in their places, but the policeman was not re. He had seen nothing to worry about, and so he had majestically arted during the interval, leaving behind him—alas!—a fine chance promotion.

III

“Shurr-up!”

“Order, *please!*”

“Sh-sh-sh.”

“Gerr-outcher!”

“Give order, *please!*”

“Send ’em out!”

“Sh-sh-sh.”

“Give order, genelmen, *if you please!*”

“Ow! Ah-oo-er! Pur a sock in it!”

“ . . . behalf of my fellow artistes, like to appeal to those member the audience at the back there to keep quiet (Here, here!), like th to remember that other people have paid their money and want to h the show properly . . . (Turn ’em out!) . . . fair play . . . Bri sportsmanship . . . thanking you one and all . . . .”

The audience loudly applauded this speech of Jimmy’s, but the n was even worse afterwards. Poor Mrs. Joe, imploring the Red Sun sink in-toe the West (just as if she thought it was uncertain in its mo ments for once, and feared some cosmic catastrophe), could hardly heard, for the people who were indignant at the constant interrupti were as noisy as the people who interrupted. In vain she paused betw verses, a figure erect and contemptuous, the Duchess of Dorking sta ing before a revolutionary tribunal. The silence she waited for ne arrived. With a glance of despair not unmixed with pleading, addres to the shirt front and bare arm in the box, she plunged into her sec song. She was a Highland lassie now, a passionate tragic creature the moors and the glens, waiting and watching for our old acquainta Angus MacDonald. Would he or would he not, she asked in her dee chest notes, come from his camp o’er the sea? Did she hear the of the pibroch? Apparently she did, though to everybody else it soun like the last despairing bleat (“Order, gents, *please!*”) of the aged atte ant in the pit. She also heard the marching of men, but everybody e heard something like this too, a stamping of feet at the back. Yes, was Angus Her Own coming home from the war. She asserted t triumphantly at the top of her voice, and even then she could har ard. It seemed as if Angus was bringing the war home with him. trembling, she stalked off tragically at the end of her song, and did eturn to face the uproar, though most of it was honest and admiring use.

anwhile, it was taking Miss Trant and Mr. Oakroyd all their time strain Joe in the wings from descending into the auditorium and cking a few blasted heads together." When Mrs. Joe came off, ever, he had to attend to her, for after smiling wildly and elabo- shrugging her shoulders and raising her hands, she suddenly burst tears. "I've not been so—so—so insulted since that awful time at isby," she sobbed, "when they were all drunk—and threw the fish." muttering that somebody was going to get something worse than gave her all the support of his stalwart person, and finally she was aded to rest in her dressing-room, where Miss Trant administered le-Cologne and soothing words. Four of them were now struggling successfully through a noisy quartette, full of comic "business." attendant in the pit had given up his task of restoring order in air. One or two members of the audience, pugnacious men, had npted to take over his duties, with the result that there were loud ments at the back for some time, and once or twice the sound of a t scuffle. The remainder of the audience was becoming very restive ed. One of the loudest and most indignant members was no other our friend, Mr. Monte Mortimer, whose professional sense of rum was outraged by these constant interruptions, as well they it be, for he had heard nothing like it for years. If a few first- ters in the gallery ventured a timid hiss or boo at Mr. Mortimer's uctions, he filled the papers next day with wild talk of conspiracies terrible threats. Now, his was one of the loudest of the hushing es, and every now and then he half rose from his seat and looked d, as if he were inclined to take charge of the proceedings himself. eave it to me, Jimmy," Mr. Morton Mitcham whispered, with all confidence of a man who has been four times round the world. managed tougher crowds than this. Let's put on my conjuring with you gagging in the house."

nere was something to be said for this. It meant that Jimmy would end to be a very rude member of the audience, who from the back of the pit would carry on an argument with Mr. Mitcham, who w finally ask him to step on to the stage, along with some other and b fide members of the audience, to "watch him closely." Mr. Mitc was an old hand, and was clever at getting laughs at the expense o assistants from the audience. This might do the trick, creating o out of deliberate disorder. Jimmy had some misgivings, but thoug was worth trying, and off he went to change his costume and then s round to the back, leaving Mr. Mitcham in possession of the stage. Mitcham began by playing the banjo, but soon gave that up. Joe bro on his conjuring apparatus for him, and the two of them started gagg

"I shall now require a few members of the audience," Mr. Mitc announced, in his harsh deep drawl, "to assist me and to prove to ladies and gentlemen, there is absolutely no deception."

This was the cue for Jimmy, at the back, to open the comic dialo But something went wrong, apparently, for all that could be heard f the stage was a real argument. Then Jimmy's voice was raised genuine protest: "Here, half a minute, you chaps!" he was crying. "H what you doing? Let go."

"A few members of the audience, please," Mr. Mitcham was repeat

This was where chaos broke in, and an ordered narrative, even i were possible, would no longer fit the occasion. There was a m ment towards the stage, vague in the darkness. "House lights!" Mitcham hissed, but they did not come on. There was a door at right of the proscenium that led directly through, a short flight of st steps bringing you into the wings. It seemed some people from back were making for that door. There was also a central gang running through both pit and stalls, there being no barrier, only a th cord, between them, and down this gangway came several figures, n moving forward, now scuffling. And Jimmy's voice was heard fr this group, still raised in protest. So far, so good, but now comes ch bewildering alternations of light and darkness, hurtling fragments event.

"Let go, can't you!"

"'Ere, what's the ruddy idea?"

"Turn 'em out."

"Lights up, there, you fools!"

h, will you!"

d shouts from some of the men and screams from some of the
en. There seemed to be a struggle going on in the gangway, not
rom the stage now. Jimmy was in it.

en a large figure sprang up from nowhere, charged into the scuffling
p, and sent one or two men flying. It was Joe. "Oh, you get out
," he was heard to bellow. And then somebody did get out of it.
e was a crack; there was a thud; somebody had taken a full punch
the furious Joe. More shouts, screams, and cracks. That uncon-
s somebody, it seemed, was being lifted out of the way. Then the
s came on, uncertainly, as if they did not like it.

y God!" cried Inigo, starting up from the piano. "It's Monte
timer." And it was. Mr. Mortimer had interfered in the dark;
ad got in the way; he had received Joe's punch; and he was not
nd those voices, where there was peace. We shall never meet him
n. Farewell, Monte!

mebody was shouting for the curtain to be dropped; twenty people
roaring for the police; and about a hundred more were shouting
ndom. Out went the house lights again, suddenly this time. Next
ute, the stage lights had vanished too. The whole place was in dark-
, a black pandemonium.

ey!" Mr. Oakroyd had cried, as three or four of them came clat-
g up the steps and round the corner. A rough lot they looked, too.
at you doing here?"

oming on the stage," one of them had replied. But another had
put his lip out and growled "Gairrr away!"

ar, tak' your hook," he had told them, angrily.

hen he got a shove in the back that sent him banging against one
hem, a big one. This fellow gave him another shove that sent him
ning. Then all the lights went out. Somebody had got at the switch-
d. He jumped forward, bumped into a fellow, got a crack on the
d, but was able to give somebody something to be getting on with.
stage-hand was shouting somewhere. So were a lot of other people.
charged at the switchboard, but people and things got in the way.
n he found himself grappling with somebody, got tripped up, went
g in the dark, with several people falling over him.

"Fire! Fire!" a voice shouted, not far away.

"Fire! Fire! Fire!" Innumerable voices took it up, voices rising screams.

Desperately Mr. Oakroyd picked himself up. "There's no blo fire," he was yelling, in despair.

"No fire," somebody was shouting on the stage. "Keep your s please."

The uproar now was terrific, horrible. There were huge crashes over the place. "Get them lights on," roared a voice. "The lights, lights!" And from further away: "Fire! Fy-yer! Fy-yerr!"

Another dash for the switchboard. Somebody else making for it Joe. "Come on, Joe lad," cried Mr. Oakroyd. Somebody there. T of them. "Tak' that, yer ——," from Mr. Oakroyd, who landed one first, this time. The other fellow gave a yell, his companion a gr and Mr. Oakroyd grabbed a switch or two. The lights that came now showed Joe leaping after one of the men; the other had drop Mr. Oakroyd dashed on to the stage, to shout that there was no The place was like a madhouse. Everybody was shouting and scre ing, pushing and struggling. "Keep your seats!" they shouted from stage, he and Jimmy and Morton Mitcham and Inigo, with the wom of the party beside them now, pale, amazed. But he had not been th a minute before all the lights but two or three, high up and giving merest glimmer, went out again. That switchboard. He collided in wings with a woman who had just dashed up the steps from the fr a large woman, screaming something—sounded like "Jerry." Must h been too, because the next moment, Jerry Jerningham appeared fr nowhere, was immediately grabbed by this large woman, and whis off, somewhere at the back. From somewhere too there came a serie crashes. Things were being overturned. Electric bulbs were going Chaps came jumping out of the big shadows, making off. They w still shouting "Fire!" somewhere. Mr. Oakroyd got some more li on. There was a smell of burning too; it seemed to be coming o from the other side. He called to the others and hurried across. Ple of smoke. It seemed to be coming from that pile of old curtain s there. He and Inigo got two extinguishers on it. No flame, but smoke was worse, blinding and choking. Something rickety there ling a bit. Joe was shouting down from the top. He heard the rustle behind him. The curtain was coming down, moving by it seemed, for he could not see anybody lowering it. A chap went ig past. Wasn't that Joe coming down, still shouting? These big pieces—part of the theatre's standard set, and very old—didn't seem too safe. Here, they'd better look out. Something gave a nasty e.

ook out!" he yelled to them at the back. "Get out o' t'way, sharp!" Trant, Jimmy, Susie, with her arms full of music, were still there. houted again, ran forward, waving his arms at them.

u would have thought the whole theatre had fallen in, it fell with a crash, that piece of scenery. Susie and Mr. Oakroyd were unied. Jimmy was sitting on the stage, groaning, his head in his s. But Miss Trant was lying there, white and still. The police coming now, were actually here. There was the clamour of a fire-ie coming from somewhere outside. Miss Trant never moved as bent over her, crying her name.

IV

l, you've made a benefit of this all right," said the Inspector grimly. udience was composed of Inigo and Joe, still in their stage costumes, n were torn and filthy, Mr. Oakroyd, all bruised and blackened, two members of the staff of the Gatford Hippodrome. The rest gone, most of them between half an hour and an hour ago. It was y an hour since Miss Trant had been taken away to the hospital, Jimmy, still groaning, in attendance.

hat do they say at the hospital—about Miss Trant?" Inigo asked, ly. He had never felt more tired in all his life. He could not on his feet any longer. He felt dizzy, sick.

n getting that through for you," replied the Inspector. "I'll have in a minute or two. You chaps had better be getting along home You're played out, I can see that. Meantime, I've got to be making ut my report." He looked about him with a sardonic eye. The had not done very much damage; indeed, it was almost out when re-brigade arrived. Nevertheless, the Gatford Hippodrome looked eck. The stampede had left its traces on the body of the theatre, and the stage was a blackened and watery ruin. "This part of it's n ing," the Inspector went on, "though I don't say it isn't bad enou Nobody'll be giving a turn here for some time. It's life though, property, that matters. There might have been dozens of lives lo dozens, yes, scores—with people all trying to get out at once. M of fact, there isn't any so far, and doesn't look like being any. Lu I'll tell you, very lucky. Seven people injured, that's all the figure got—that's in the audience, not counting your two."

"It'ud ha' been all nowt, Inspector," said Mr. Oakroyd earnestly, they hadn't ha' gone an' shouted 'Fire'! like that. I knew what i be. We tried to stop 'em."

"But there was a fire," said the Inspector.

"Nay, ther wasn't, not when they were shouting. It come after, t'fire, and it were nowt when it did come. Me an' him put most o out oursens, easy."

"That's true," said Inigo wearily.

"Well, who started it all?" said the Inspector.

"I've told yer," replied Mr. Oakroyd. "Chaps 'at came from bac t'pit started it all. Turned t'lights off to begin wi', an' it must ha' b them as shouted 'Fire!'"

"Sure of it," said Joe, and explained what happened to him whe the trouble first began.

"We'll have to look into this," said the Inspector dubiously. " they got away, that's all. Nothing to work on at all."

"Nay, you've got one on 'em, t'chap Joe an' me were sitting o long," said Mr. Oakroyd. "Hey, sergeant, didn't you tak' yon chap t'red scarf? He were one on 'em."

"That's right, sir," said the sergeant, coming up. "We got hi right. It's Tulley."

"Oh, it's Tulley, is it? We know him all right. An old frien ours, Tulley is. What's he got to say?"

"Knows nothing about it, sir. Happened to be in the audience says, and was getting out this way."

"He's lyin'," Mr. Oakroyd declared.

"We'll see about that," replied the Inspector, who was still busy ing stock of the situation. He poked about for a few minutes and n e notes, while the tattered remnants of *The Good Companions* ed on listlessly. They said nothing, for there seemed to be nothing ay now until they had had news from the hospital. At last, how-, a policeman arrived with the message, which he delivered into the ector's ear as if it were a state secret.

Vell, it's not so bad," said the Inspector, turning to them. "In fact, good. The lady's suffering from shock and a fractured arm, that's No need for anybody to worry——"

hey gave huge sighs of relief.

And your other friend—the little man, Nunn—only got a crack on head. They're keeping him there overnight, but he'll probably be tomorrow or the day after. He's all right, though there won't be song-and-dance for him for a week or two, I should say."

igo found himself giggling in a helpless sort of way. Everything been rather crazy for some time now, of course, but still he didn't t to giggle about it.

ou change your clothes and get to bed, my boy," said the Inspector. ve a bite of food and a drink of something and then turn in, quick. chaps too. Off you go. You can't do any more here. And, I say, t leave the town until I've seen you again. I've got your addresses, n't I? All right then, pop off."

hey had changed and were just straggling off, like a little company hipwrecked sailors, when they met Susie, who looked like a fantastic ghost as she came through the stage door. She was still wearing stage costume, though she had a big coat over it, and there were s of make-up on her face, a pale ruin of rouge and tear stains.

Have you heard?" she cried, and when they said they had, she ex-ned she had just come from the hospital. "It's not so bad, is it?" said, smiling wanly.

Better ner like," Mr. Oakroyd agreed.

Mrs. Joe's waiting for you at the digs, Joe," she went on. "She told to tell you. And you'd to hurry up because she was going to see e was something hot for supper."

Ther should be a bit o' summat for me an' all," remarked Mr. Oak- contemplatively. "I hadn't thowt owt about it, but I'm right peckish nar. Happen ther'll be a bit o' meat-and-tater pie warmed Yon landlady o' mine is great on meat-and-tater pie."

"Let's keep out of the main street," said Susie, first slipping a h inside Joe's arm, then taking the expectant arm, Inigo's, on the ot side, and squeezing them both a little. "We don't want anybody to us, do we?" They trudged on in silence down the gloomy side-str Doors were being slammed with a kind of savage finality. Somewh not far away, a hoarse reveller was shouting:

"'E's a dee-ar old pal,
Ja-holly old pal,
But 'e opens 'is mouth tew wi-ide."

It was Mr. Oakroyd, who had just been considering, for the first t in true perspective, the whole daft evening, who broke the sile "Well, by gow!" he began. "Nar who'd ha' thowt——"

But he was not allowed to say any more. "Don't start," said S hastily. "Just keep quiet, Jess lad. It's been a mess, an awful m I've cried enough tonight, I don't want to cry any more. And I d want to talk about it now. There'll be plenty of time to talk abou all next week."

"Absolutely," said Inigo wearily.

"I dare say," said Joe. "Never mind, Susie. What's going to hap next week anyhow?"

"God knows!"

"I'm sorry, lass. I'll say ner more. I'll go on thinking about my o' meat-and-tater pie. We're not dead yet, though I seem to be stiff'n a bit. Summat'll turn up."

So they went trudging on, as quiet as the four shadows in t grotesque dance on the pavement, lengthening and dwindling betw the street lamps.

Chapter Five

LONG, AND FULL OF SALVAGE WORK

I

ELL, well!" cried the voice, though softly. "Well, well!"

"Is it the same?" asked the nurse.

he very same," the voice replied. It had lost some of the deep h burr it had had years ago, this voice, but there was no mistaking No," it went on now, "I'll not do that. Let her have her sleep out."

ss Trant, however, had already had her sleep out. She was awake although her eyes were still closed and she had not stirred. The d of that first quiet but startled "Well!" had drawn her from some dreamless place into an upper region of flickering shadows, dreams voices. Where was she? The hotel? The hospital? No. The nd Nursing Home. And it was Tuesday afternoon. She was back in full consciousness, though all it offered her at the moment was a ering brownish space and these two voices. And one of them his, hardly changed at all.

e opened her eyes, which discovered a world very bright, solid, ng as if it had just been made. He was standing by the door. She not surprised to see him. She had not been surprised to hear his . It was as if she had spent years and years being surprised *not* e him and hear his voice, and that that state of things had now ly stopped.

ello!" she cried, feebly.

came forward, smiling. He looked older, of course, but not gely so. On the contrary, he looked more himself, as if this were ge he had been aiming at when she had known him, years ago.

Elizabeth Trant," he said, with deliberation. Nobody else would said it like that.

octor Hugh McFarlane," she replied, giving him her hand.

The nurse nodded brightly at the pair of them and departed.

"I thought you were asleep," he said, sitting down beside her, " I didn't mean to disturb you."

"You recognised me then?"

"I did," and left it at that. He was just the same. He was cap of leaving the most gigantic gaps in conversation, never dreamt of fil them in with the nearest rubbish.

"How did you know I was here? Did you—read about us in paper?" For the local paper had been very excited about last Satur doings at the Hippodrome.

"No, I never saw a word about it in the paper," he replied. "T would be the paper here though, wouldn't it? I only see *The Ti* and *Glasgow Herald,* and there wasn't anything in them about it."

"I should hope not."

"But I did hear something about it," he continued, thrashing the t out in the same old way. "Then I had to come here to see a patie mine and saw your name, so I came to see if it was the Miss Eliza Trant I knew."

She could not resist it. "I thought you would have forgotten all a me by this time," she murmured.

He shook his head gravely. "Not at all. I hadn't forgotten yo recognised you as soon as I came in. You haven't changed much, with your little accident too. Subnormal now, aren't you? Yes, would be."

"I thought I saw you—in a car—the other day," she told him. " day last week it was, about ten miles out of Gatford. I came t conclusion that it couldn't be you, but now I think it must have b

"Now exactly when was that? Last week, you say. What tin day would it be?" He brought out, quite solemnly, a little pocket-

"Afternoon, sometime," she replied vaguely. "It was—let me you were on the main road going out of Gatford—it seems ages now. Oh, it doesn't matter, does it?"

"It must have been last Tuesday, I think," he said, frowning ha his little book. "Today week. I'd called here. Was I driving two-seater? I was? Then it was me you saw. Isn't that curiou wish I'd known you were here."

ss Trant hesitated for a moment, evaded his level glance, then said y: "As a matter of fact, we—I—tried to find out if you were here, o make sure. But your name wasn't in the telephone book. And rs are always in the telephone book, aren't they?"

ot if they've just arrived," he said, smiling at her. "There hasn't time to put me in the telephone directory yet. I've just entered partnership with Doctor Heard—he's a man of some age and is g up the practice soon—out there at Waterfield on the main road. uldn't have come here but I've been doing some work on the hyroid glands, and that meant being near Masters in London or on here in Gatford. So I came here to work with Hudson. You'll heard of him?"

n afraid I haven't," she said, smiling back at him. "It's terrible, ou people do the most wonderful things and we never hear any- about you."

stroked his long bony face. "I suppose that is so, though I can't lain myself because I haven't done anything wonderful yet. But did you come to be here? I never knew you had any inclinations ds the stage."

laughed. "I hadn't and I haven't. It's all rather ridiculous, though st say it doesn't seem very funny just now." And she told him, , what had happened since her father died. Sometimes he stared in blank amazement, and sometimes he gave a little low chuckle. de her feel as if she were describing a visit to the moon.

nd now," she concluded, "don't ask me what I'm going to do, be- I don't know."

lo. You're going to stay here until that arm's mended and you've nice rest and your nerves are quiet again." He still called them ves." He still brought out those huge vowels and smashing con- ts, and when he turned his face towards the light there was still glint of hair about his cheekbones. "And if there's anything that be done, let me do it for you."

, I can't worry you with my silly affairs. I'm sure you've plenty , too much, as it is."

ot at all. I don't say I haven't plenty to do—we're always busy, you know—but still an old bachelor like me has time for anything."

"You haven't married then?"

"No." He stopped, and fingered his chin. "Up to now, I seem to h been too busy. It's a thing that takes time, I suppose, getting marri

"Well, you mustn't call yourself an *old* bachelor, not to me. You I happen to remember you're only two years older than I am, an don't want to be told I'm old too."

"Two years older! That's it exactly. Now who'd have thought would have remembered that!" he cried, lighting up and altogether m animated now. "You've as good a memory as I have."

"I remember some things very well."

"Och, so do I." He was charging in quite recklessly now, wit thinking where he might be going. "I've never heard a mention of old rock of Gibraltar without thinking of you—and the Colonel," added, hastily.

"Which of us reminds you of Gibraltar?" she enquired, laughin him. "Not me, I hope. It must have been my father. I think you always rather frightened of him."

"Of the Colonel! Not the least bit. It was you I was frightene if you must know."

"Me!" This was too absurd. A memory of that large, maste dogmatic young Scot, setting her right about everything, suddenly vaded her mind. "I'm sure that's not true. I never knew anybody bullied me quite so much."

"Ay, I was raw then, a raw lad."

Tea came in at that moment. "I've brought a cup for Doctor Farlane," the girl remarked, setting down her tray by the side of bed.

"Thank you," said Miss Trant. "You will stay, won't you? Y have to pour it out for both of us, I'm afraid. I can't manage it this arm all tied up."

If she imagined he would be very awkward and clumsy with teapot, she was wrong. He did it all very deftly indeed, and she no now—and this was a new discovery—that his long bony hands very finely controlled, sensitive. And then—it came in a flash whil was finishing her first piece of bread-and-butter—she suddenly felt edible it was that he should be actually there, the whole enormous p of him, so tremendously like himself, quietly sharing her tea. And one part of her, so small and remote that it could not be said to have oice, refused to see anything incredible in all this, would not even aintly surprised, but settled itself down, as if this were the natural er of things. They talked easily now, chiefly about the present, Gat- and *The Good Companions,* and so forth. The afternoon, itself a flower of the early spring, filled the room with washed and delicate t, called out anew the scent of the daffodil and narcissus, and was tically busy with rumours of a fragrant and budding world outside.

And will you be going on with this—er—stage business?" he asked When he saw her smile a little ruefully and shake her head, his d cleared. "There's nothing wrong with it, of course," he con- ed, "but it seems a daft sort of thing for somebody like yourself to be g."

The moment they can get on without me, I shall give it up," she essed. "It's been—well, fun, if you like. Anyhow, I wouldn't have ed it for anything. But for some time now I've been thinking I nt to give it up. You see, to begin with, it's impossible for me to it seriously ——"

should think not," cried Dr. McFarlane heartily, with the air of a to whom a troupe of pierrots are no more than so many buzzing

But that's not fair to them, you see. It's their world, their life. I t want to let them down now. It looked as if everything was going e splendid. We were making money, and I was getting back all ost. The clever young ones all thought they might get engagements own, because some big revue man came down on Saturday to see n."

Was the row too much for him?"

Oh no, worse than that. It's a miserable business for them, poor s—but it's rather funny, I can't help laughing. It seems he came and mixed up somehow in a dreadful scrimmage in the audience, and who didn't know who he was and probably didn't care, having oughly lost his temper, hit this man terribly hard, so hard that he to be carried out."

"Well, well! A knock-out, eh? I wouldn't have thought an ac laddie could have done that."

"Yes, but then Joe was once a heavy-weight boxer—in the Navy."

"Ah!" said Dr. McFarlane, who apparently knew something ab heavy-weight boxers in the Navy. "He might well do that then."

"And now they're all heart-broken, though they pretend not to when they come here to see me. The young ones feel they have their chance, and one of them, Jerningham, seems to have disappea Nobody has seen him since Saturday night. One of the older on Mr. Nunn, the comedian—has his head bandaged up and won't b to act for a week or two. And the others don't know what is g to happen to them. We had taken the Hippodrome for another w but of course we couldn't play in it even if it were fit to use."

"It certainly isn't that, from what I hear," he said grimly.

"That's the awful thing," she told him. "I'm responsible for all damage."

He stared at her in horror and dismay. "You mean they'll come to you to pay for all that?"

"I believe so. The Hippodrome people are going to claim it all f me. It's a wicked shame because it wasn't our fault at all, and w already suffered for it. And just as I thought I should get back of the money I'd lost, this comes along. Oh, it's a miserable busi And the others are absolutely heart-broken about it. They feel it's fault, though it isn't at all, of course. It's mine, if it's anybody's—

"Don't pay a penny piece," he cried, rising from his chair. Bec a man has been working hard on parathyroid glands, and in addi has contrived to remember a girl he once knew on a voyage years that does not mean that he cannot be appalled at the thought of money being paid out like that. It was a prospect to make hundred McFarlanes turn in their graves. It now made this McFarlane strid and down the room. "You've heard nothing definite yet?" he as finally.

"No, not yet," she replied, smiling rather wanly. She suddenly tired now.

He stopped, looked at her, then quietly sat down again. "You're t now, Elizabeth?" he said, not taking his eyes off her face.

coloured faintly. "I believe I am."

hould I have said 'Miss Trant'?"

o, of course not," returning his steady look with wide candid grey

oo much talking. It's my fault."

hen I shall have to report you to Doctor Mason, Hugh. But don't
r a minute. Let me talk a little longer and then I shall feel better.
t do you think I ought to do? I had thought of asking my brother-
v—he's a solicitor in town—to come up and try and straighten it all
or me, but he and Hilda, my sister, are in the South of France.
even if they weren't, somehow I don't want the family here, crow-
over me. Then I thought of asking Mr. Truby, he's my own
tor at Cheltenham, to see what he could do, but he's—well, I don't
e'd be much good. He probably thinks I'm mad."

it's a matter of taking to the law, I don't mean in court, but just
represented, then a local man is what you want, a man who knows
goes on in this town. I know a solicitor here—he's a patient of
—of the name of Gooch, a fat fellow but sharp as a needle. I'll
d talk to him about it, and do what I can myself at the same time.
all you've got to do is to lie here quietly, not seeing your actor
s too often, just making your mind easy, reading a book or
—" He broke off, and regarded her quizzically. "Do you still
e yourself to those romances and historical novels you used to like
ll?"

s. I don't read quite so many as I used to do—there aren't good
h ones to go on with—but I haven't tired yet."

o you remember my telling you I thought them awful trash? I
raw then, if ever a lad was. I've been ploughing my way through
er Scott whiles, and there's a great deal of human nature in those
rley Novels of his. He'd have made a fine general practitioner,
alter would."

ere! You're coming on, Hugh."

gave a short confused laugh. "No, I'm going on. I'll be looking
morrow if I can at all. If not, the next day for certain. That is,
would like to see me."

course I should like to see you. I didn't think, though, you'd be able to get here again as early as that. Is—er—your patient here wors

“Ay,” he replied, with only the ghost of a twinkle to show that a j was in progress, “poor fellow, he seems to have taken a turn for worse since this afternoon. So he'll need an early return visit.” rose and took her hand. “It's been a strange meeting this. I di think you'd have remembered.”

“It was clever of you to recognize me at once, like that, when I asleep too.”

Having brought off one joke, there was no holding him now. won't say I remembered your face, Miss Elizabeth Trant,” he s solemnly, “but from the way you were lying, the sterno-mastoid mu was prominent, and I thought I remembered the look of that.”

“What! Where? You don't—— Oh, I see. You are absurd. V well, Doctorrr H-ew McFarrrlane, it was your terrible accent—an' o that—ah rrememberred. Good-bye, Hugh. And if you can do anyth to prevent me from having to throw all my money away here in G ford, I shall be awfully grateful.”

Looking very grave again, at the thought of money being thro away, he stood before her and declared with emphasis that he would something about it. He was wearing a good suit—and was a far sma figure than the bony young man she had known before—but it wan brushing in places and there were one or two deplorable little stains burns here and there. And his tie, of course, was monstrous. But gr ing hair suited him; he was almost handsome now.

“Fancy Doctor McFarlane being such an old friend!” cried the nu afterwards. She was removing things very deftly, but as she spoke kept an eye on her patient's face. Her duties compelled her to see chiefly in terms of that rickety machine, the body, so it is not surpris that her hobby should have been human interest. Her next “Fancy which was not long in coming, had quite a note of triumph in it. E dently things were looking up in the Mirland Nursing Home.

II

“You've not had a reply?” cried Susie.

“I have,” Inigo replied, coming into the room. It was some time af eleven on the Wednesday morning. Susie had been dusting her sitti

›m, which was also her landlady's parlour, in a fashion that fluctuated :ween the dreary and the dreamy. Ever since Saturday night, she d felt lost.

'It's not from Monte Mortimer himself," Inigo went on, speaking her carefully, as if he thought he was a solicitor or some one of that ıd. "It's from his secretary."

'That's all the same. Hurry up, idiot, and tell me what he says. u're so *slow,* Inigo." Then she plomped down into a chair. "It's a shout, isn't it? I can see it is. Go on, though."

'It's a letter and from the secretary," said Inigo, sitting down and :ing out the sheet of paper. "This is what it says: Dear Sir, I have nmunicated your yesterday's wire to Mr. Mortimer, who is away m the office at present, and he requests me, in reply, to tell you to go the devil. He also requests me to add that any further communication m you or any other member of your troupe will be regarded as com- ; from there and will not receive any reply whatever. Yours truly, Hamilton Levy, Secretary. And that," Inigo added, with a poor at- npt at nonchalance, "is that."

'Let me have a look at it," Susie commanded, and then read it ough herself. Having done that, she crumpled it fiercely and hurled into the fire. "And to think I've been sorry for that—that object— the last three days! Mean beast! I hope Joe's punch knocked him y. I don't care, I do."

'Well, it did, my dear," said Inigo, "hence this colossal snub, abso- ely. Looks to me as if he's still off duty."

'I wouldn't have minded so much if he hadn't been so Smart Alecky ›ut it. There's no need for him to try to be funny. His next revue'll ed all the gags he can ever think of. Anyhow, he must be a rotten ınager or he'd never let a thing like that stop him from getting in ne good new talent. If I was running a show, I wouldn't care if I t fifty biffs, I'd engage people who could do something."

'I'm awfully sorry, Susie," he began.

'Don't be silly. It's not your fault. It isn't anybody's fault really, d it certainly isn't yours. It's a washout, that's all, and the best thing :an do is to remember it's twice daily on the pier, or if fine at the :rhead and if wet in the shelter, that's my programme—if I'm lucky, because it's boiling down to that now, when you come to think of i Hell! Give me a cigarette. No, don't, thanks. I don't want one."

"You ought to smoke a pipe," he said, lighting his. "By the way, saw Jimmy this morning——"

"Is he better?"

"Practically. Head still hums a bit, and says he's dizzy when he tri to walk about. He won't be fit for work for a week or two. But wha I wanted to say was, Mamie Potter's gone."

"Thank God! She wasn't much good anyhow, and she's brought u nothing but rotten luck. Thinks we're not good enough for her now, suppose?"

"Something like that. Anyhow, she's gone. And nobody seems t know anything about Master Jerningham."

"Oh, he's pushed off too, I expect," said Susie, who was clearly anxiou to relieve her feelings. "He would! He'll look after himself all right— Ai give you mai ward."

"I dunno. He may turn up again, babbling about his trousers as h did last time. Where was that? Tewborough, wasn't it? Gosh! th holes we've been in, Susie!"

"It's nothing to the hole we're in now, laddie," she said darkly. "We'r in a mess, busted absolutely—as our sweet young pianist says. There' poor Miss Trant in a nursing home, and though she's sweet about it she must be fed up to the teeth with the lot of us. They say she'll hav to pay for all the damage too. Well, she's had enough of it, you ca bet. No more *Good Companions* for her. That means we shan't hav a cent to go on with. If she offered us any money, I wouldn't take it Not after all she's done and had to pay out."

"Well, I've got a spot, you know," he remarked.

"Keep your spot, my child. I'm coming to your part in it soon. The Potter's gone. That doesn't matter, but still it means we'll have to ge another soubrette. Jerry's gone too, and that's really awkward. Yo wouldn't get another light comedian as good—not for C. P. work—i you advertised till all was blue. Then Jimmy's not fit for work yet We'd have to put in old Jess as a Yorkshire comedian. Wouldn't he be marvellous! It's all right laughing, but—oh, it's murder. I saw myself up in town by this time, signing contracts like mad, looking for a flat.

ıat a hope! And a week ago I was sniffing at Bournemouth. Bourneuth! It wouldn't look at us now. Two-night stands are all we're for, with a return visit to Rawsley the event of the season. Susie an. A riot of Sandybay! Front chairs one-and-tenpence! Patron- the pierrots, girls and boys! Oh, hell—oh!—oh ——"

Susie!" He jumped out of his chair.

he shook her head fiercely, her thick dark bobbed hair swinging. en she touched his hand for a moment and pushed him back. "No, lown, idiot. We're both idiots. I work myself up in the most ghastly y these days. It must be because I'm so excited inside all the time, have n for days."

I know," said Inigo sympathetically. He was sitting down again now, his hands were stretched out in front of him, as if it was impossible estrain them from reaching out to her.

You don't know. You don't know anything about it." She was smil- mistily. "O lord! where's my handkerchief? Wait a minute. Now n, I've not finished yet. There's you."

Me! What about me? I'm all right."

You're not. To begin with, you're absurd, and always will be. , don't start saying you're not, because that's not what I'm going to about. You went up to Felder and Hunterman's on Saturday, y heard your stuff, and what's his name—you know ——"

Pitsner?"

That's right. Well, Pitsner wanted your songs, didn't he, just as t ape Monte Mortimer did?"

He did. I won't say he was keen, because I don't believe that man s ever keen about anything. He's got a sort of 'But she is in her ve, and oh the difference to me!' look about him, Master Pitsner. Still, wanted them all right."

Well, there you are. Pitsner didn't get a punch from Joe, you know."

True," Inigo murmured. He knew what was coming and was hop- to dodge it. "Pitsner didn't. But I've no doubt at all that some- ng could be arranged, if you feel he ought to have one too. He could ne down here for it, or perhaps one of us might go up there ——"

'Don't be funny," she told him wearily. "You're not bad until you rt being funny. Then you make me feel sick. Let's talk sense. You know he'll take those songs like a shot. And you know—or you oug to know, by this time—you can make bags of money up there turni out these things. Well, that's where you're going."

"You mean—I ought to clear out too?"

"Of course! The sooner the better!"

"But I don't want to."

"I dare say," she cried. "Because I'm not going, eh? I know yo little game. You want to stay with us, going the old round, thumpi out the old stuff, and looking at me over the top of the piano wi the love-light in your eyes. For her sake alone he—thingumtybobb —renounced wealth and fame. Love was his guiding star. Came t dawn. Yeogh!" Here she gave a very unladylike imitation of acu sickness. "What do you think you are—a little hero from Hollywoo Out you go, laddie. Honestly, you don't want to go trailing roun another year—Rawsley, Dotworth, Sandybay, Winstead, Haxby, Middl ford, and Tewborough—my God!"

"Oh, I don't know," said Inigo, examining the bowl of his pipe wi unnecessary interest. "Seeing England and all that. On t'road—as o friend, Master Oakroyd, says. It's the sort of experience that might b very useful to a man of letters——"

"Man of letters!" Susie made a number of uncomplimentary noise

Inigo flushed and kicked out a foot at nothing in particular. "Sh up, Susie. I will write something decent some day, you see if I don't

Her dark eyes rested on his sulky boy's face for a moment, and lo their hard brilliance. "Sorry! I don't know anything about it. I onl know about silly songs, and you're marvellously clever at them. An how, the point is—no self-sacrifice stuff. You've got to clear out this mess."

"But you see, there's no self-sacrifice stuff about it," he explaine quietly and slowly, while he examined, with what was apparently stron distaste, a large photogravure bearing the title *On the Road to Gretn Green*. "I want to be where you are, as I've told you before."

To this Susie made no reply. She looked into the fire, and they wer both silent for a minute or two. "But after all," she said, finally, " you want to do something for me, you ought to clear out and get up t London. Look what you did last Saturday."

That's true,” he cried, brightening. “That's the place to work it
n.” He paused, thinking it over. “I don't know, though. I'd have
p at it, of course, but last Saturday's effort was gigantic cheek, abso-
ly, and I don't know if I could drag out any more Monte Mortimers.
, you could slip up, couldn't you?”

e nodded, then frowned at the fire. “It's a mess. Everything's got
a mess. I expect you must think sometimes I'm an awful little hard
always on the make. No, listen,” as he began to protest, “But
ething nags at me inside telling me to get on quick. It's a sort of
ng I have about my father and mother. I've told you about it
re, haven't I? As if it was because they had such a rotten time.
I feel I can't wait long. It's all right people saying ‘Oh, you're
ng. Plenty of time!’—that sounds all right—but there isn't. If noth-
happens, I'll get stale soon. I know I will. I oughtn't to, but there
are. I expect I haven't the guts to keep on and keep it up.”

That's rot. I see what you mean, absolutely, but it's rot about not
ng the guts. You've guts enough for ten.”

e laughed, came over to him, and twisted a finger in his lock of
. “Awful, isn't it? We sound like a butcher's shop. Let's talk
t something else.”

y the way,” he began. “Ow! That hurts. Look here, creature,
u want to know what to do with your hands——”

don't, thank you,” letting him go.

ity,” he grumbled. “However, I was going to say, I've just remem-
d that Saturday night was your benefit.”

ou don't mean to say you'd forgotten that?”

No, not exactly. What I meant was, I'd forgotten you got the money.
v much was it, and what have you done with it, and so on and so
n?”

haven't done anything with it, idiot. Matter of fact, I don't know
tly how much it all comes to yet, but anyhow I'm not taking it.
course not, don't be silly! How can I? Here's Miss Trant going
e run in for hundreds and hundreds. I can't possibly take any-
g.”

No, I suppose not,” he replied, poking his face meditatively with
stem of his pipe. “Gosh! I'd forgotten about that.”

"You're lucky! That's all part of the hellish mess. I'm going to Miss Trant this afternoon. I think I'll ask Mrs. Joe to come too. times like this, us girls must stick together, my child."

They looked at one another, laughed, then carefully explained t they were really very miserable. And indeed they were about as pressed as it was possible for two such lively, youthful, optimistic s to be. It was all the worse because there was nothing for them to

"Well," said Inigo at length, after wandering vaguely about the ro "I suppose I must be thinking about a spot of food. I'm having lu out somewhere. Coming with me?"

"I don't feel like facing *Ye Jollie Dutche,*" she told him. "I think tea-and-egg it here. Hello, what's that?"

"That, my dear," he replied, at the window, "is a car. And it's stopp here."

"Let me have a look. I knew it was. I felt it was. I've seen that before somewhere. Something's going to happen, Inigo. It is, I kn it is."

"What?"

"I don't know. Come away from the window or you might spoi No, we must pretend now we don't care, else it might stop happen at the last minute. I've always felt that, haven't you? There you ar knock."

"Probably the doctor or somebody like that."

"It can't be. I'm sure it isn't."

And it wasn't. The landlady's head appeared and announced th shover had called with a message for Miss Dean and for Mr. Jolli too if he was here, which he was as her own eyes could see for th selves, and she would send it in to give it to them.

Susie recognised the chauffeur at once, and we recognise him too, h ing met him once on the pier at Sandybay and then again, one Sun afternoon, outside Hicklefield. Yes, it is Lawley, Lady Partlit's chauff

"And you're to come round to the Victoria Midland Hotel for lu Miss," he explained. "And you, sir, too. I was going round to y rooms, but this has saved me the trouble. And I had to tell you it was specially important, and they would be expecting you as soo you could get round."

hey?" cried Susie. "Who are the others? Yes, we'll come, won't Inigo? But what's it all about?"

Vell," said Lawley, grinning, "it's a bit of a surprise, Miss. You'll see."

sie looked at him a moment with widening eyes, then flashed a ce that might have meant a thousand things at Inigo, and bolted, ming as she went, "Back in a minute!"

Jot so blowy as it has been," remarked Lawley coolly to Inigo, "but on the cold side, if you ask me."

III

y both jumped and spoke, but Susie's cry was a second quicker than o's.

Iarried!"

es, quite a surprise, isn't it?" said the lady who had once been a lit. She glittered and jangled and flashed before their startled eyes; little round mouth looked as if it would never be shut again; her staring eyes were now dancing with happiness; and though she still nbled a cockatoo, neither cage nor jungle had ever seen a cockatoo xcited, so triumphant. "And only this very morning. What a rush, dear! I haven't breathed since Saturday, that horrible, horrible night. I've heard all about it, such a business! If I'd been a second later ng him away, I really think I should have died. At the time, of se, I could only think about him, but I've thought about you all and felt so sorry. And poor Miss Trant too! But aren't you going or is that too late?"

)f course we are," cried Susie. "It's lovely, and I'm sure you'll both narvellously happy."

bsolutely," muttered Inigo, who was still rather dazed.

Jow isn't that nice! Of course it's taken you completely by surprise. ew it would," the bride rattled on. "And now, my dear, you must eady for lunch. I think I'll ring the bell. He should be here any ute now. Telephoning, you know. We haven't had a single mot to spare since Monday morning, it's been such a rush. There he think." She flew to the door. "Here we are, darling, and they both so surprised—I knew they would be. Isn't it amusing?"

Susie was the first again. "Marvellous, Jerry!" She was busy sha his hand. "I'm so glad. I hadn't any idea what was happening."

For one wild moment, Inigo, who had not yet come to his se saw himself stepping forward to congratulate Jerningham on becor Lord Partlit or something of that kind. It seemed incredible that P should be merged into Jerningham. "Many happy returns," he s mered. "I mean—you know—best wishes and all that."

"Tharnks, Susie. Tharnks, Inigo," said Jerningham gravely and w out the flicker of an eyelid. He was more dignified, more beau than ever, but his accent was also more fantastic. That alone had b unsettled by these momentous events; strange at any time, it was wildly alien; and every sentence he spoke heaped up the mangled s bles. "Glard you could cem on to lernch."

"And we've got news for them, haven't we, darling?" cried his w who looked even more excited and happy now that he was here, a there had been just a slight possibility before that he might never c back from the telephone.

"I should think you have news," said Susie, smiling and being mendously woman-to-woman.

"Oh, but that's not all, my dear, I assure you. Lots of surprises you today. Isn't Mr. Memsworth coming, darling? Lunch is rea

"Raight, he won't be lorng," replied Jerry. "He's jerst petting thr a call to tawn."

Susie glanced sharply at Inigo. "What have we here?" this gl enquired, but did not stay for an answer. A waiter arrived with c tails, and for the next few minutes they all sipped and chatted, w one eye on the door. The table was laid for five, so evidently Memsworth was to be of the party. It had quite a festive appeara though the room itself, the only small private dining-room in the h seemed to have given up hope of provincial social life about 1892. what the Victoria Midland Hotel could do, it was obviously about to for Mr. and Mrs. Jerningham.

At last, Mr. Memsworth made his entrance. It happened that th was a waiter on each side of the door when he appeared, but there ou to have been at least twenty, to say nothing of an orchestra. Mr. Me worth, however, contrived at once to create an atmosphere in which iters looked like twenty. The moment he stalked in, with his "Sorry keep you waiting" in a rich baritone that went straight to the back the dress-circle, Susie realised in a flash it was *the* Memsworth, the at Memsworth, one greater than Monte Mortimer, and known in profession as "The Emperor" or, more familiarly, perhaps ironically, "The Emp." This was partly a tribute to his managerial powers, for was the greatest despot in the musical-comedy world, and partly a ute to his actual presence, his terrific style. Unlike most manager-ducers, Mr. Memsworth had been an actor himself, having for years yed "leads" in musical comedy. Those were the days when the scene every musical comedy was set in some vague Central European state, en every leading juvenile was a prince in hussar uniform and every ncipal comedian a baron with a red nose, a squeaky voice, and a sion for ladies' maids, when every stage was noisy with heel-clicking, ssar choruses, and stentorian announcements of "His Highness, Prince chael of Slavonia." Night after night, year after year, Mr. Memsrth had been some Highness or other, with the result that the manner d grown upon him; he could not divest himself of kingship. And w that he was a manager-producer—and a very successful one, having ound knowledge of the public taste, an eye for talent, and a very good d for business—he still made princely exits and entrances, patted ple on the back as if he were bestowing an order upon them, and ghed in that hearty manner only possible to great public personages. e fashion in musical comedy had changed—and he had been one of first to recognise the fact—but Slavonia, with its soldiers and brettes, its waltz-time and impossible scenery, lived on in him. And w, as he came forward to the luncheon table, it seemed strange that was not followed by two files of baritone dragoons.

usie nearly choked when she was introduced—or rather, presented—him. She knew all about him. The Emp. himself—here in Gatford! t then, of course, Lady Partlit—Mrs. Jerningham—had something to with West End theatres. She remembered that talk in the hotel tside Hicklefield. Those were Memsworth's theatres too. It was obus now. Jerry had married her so that he could star in Memsworth's ductions—something like that. "And you're on in this, Susie," she d herself, nearly bursting with excitement.

Inigo was quite cool, for the simple reason that he did not know w Memsworth was, except that he seemed the nearest thing one could e get in this lower world to Prince Florizel of Bohemia.

They had not been sat down long when Mr. Memsworth looked grav from one to the other of them, and, raising a fork, commanded silen "Miss Dean, Mr. Jollifant," he began, in deep, solemn tones, "the ot night I had the pleasure of seeing your show here."

"When?" gasped Susie.

"On Saturday night," he told her.

"And I was there too," the bride put in. "Wasn't I, darling? And terrible night it was too, my dear."

"It was you in the box," cried Susie.

"Of course it was. It was all going to be such a nice surprise. M Memsworth had to see me on business, and I said to him 'You must co and see these clever people' and he laughed—this was on the telepho —you did laugh, didn't you, Mr. Memsworth?"

"I believe I was rather amused," the Emperor admitted. "But th who wouldn't have been, dear lady? I mean, in my position. New tale in Gatford is not an impossibility—there are no impossibilities in o profession—but it's—er—an improbability. I think you'll agree with m there."

"Absolutely," said Inigo heartily. He was enjoying Mr. Memswor and so thought that this was the least he could do.

"But though I laughed," the great man continued, very impressivel "I came, I saw—and I was conquered."

Inigo gave a sudden gurgle. "I'm sorry. But I couldn't help thin ing about Monte Mortimer, who came and saw and was conquered too

"And I hope he's still feeling it," said Susie.

The others stared at them.

"Mai dar Jollifant," said Jerningham, raising his exquisite eyebrow "whort is all this about?"

"Ah, Monte," the Emperor murmured. "So you know Monte, d you? A very able fellow, very able—in his own line of business."

"You see," cried Susie, "he was there on Saturday too—to have look at us."

"What!"

Susie and Inigo began explaining together, and contrived to tumble t the story between them.

Mr. Memsworth roared with laughter. It was as good as a baritone lo. "But do you mean to say he was laid out?" he demanded. "He s? Right under my nose too. My dear people, I'd have given unds, pounds, to have seen it. Monte! On the jaw, I think you d?" The room shook with his imperial mirth. "Waiter, the cham-gne. We must drink to this, we really must. Oh, why didn't I ow at the time. You made him come up and then he was knocked t. Monte! What a story! Next time I see Monte at the club, I all go up to him, look him in the eyes, and then simply say one word Gatford. Monte will be at my mercy. Why, if this story got out ——!" Mr. Memsworth raised his eyes, his hands, towards Heaven, d then drank some champagne. "But, Miss Dean, Mr. Jollifant, this s its serious side," he went on, solemn again now. "Are you tied with him in any way?"

"He told us to go to the devil," said Susie. And Inigo explained out the letter they had received that very morning.

"What a rude man!" cried Mrs. Jerningham.

"It's the Oriental," said Mr. Memsworth, "the Oriental, dear lady. onte is not a sportsman—never was, never will be. I know him ell, in business and outside it. A very able fellow, as I said before I don't know anybody who can put on a revue of the medium class, mi-intimate, semi-spectacular—but not a gentleman." He turned to usie and Inigo. "So that leaves you free. No more Monte! Well, don't mind admitting that I think you're lucky. I don't say that onte couldn't have done something for you. He could have done great deal. He's made one or two good people. But I can do more believe me, much more. I can put you—there."

"And will, won't you, Mr. Memsworth?" said Mrs. Jerningham, who as evidently not only happy herself but anxious that everybody else ould be happy. A bird of Paradise, not a cockatoo.

"I will try, if these—if our friends here—will allow me," he replied ajestically. "As I say, I saw the show on Saturday, and to my as-nishment, I discovered that here—playing Gatford—in a troupe whose ame is entirely unknown to me—are three young people of real, quite undoubted talent." He paused, holding them with his eye. "First, young comedienne, who can sing, who can dance, who can act, w has—and this is the great thing—charm *and* personality. If she h ambition, as I'm told she has——"

"I'm bursting with it," Susie told him breathlessly.

He bowed. "So I believe. That's very important, more importa every day. Must have ambition, must be ready to work hard, to p your profession first. Society and the journalists are ruining so ma of our young ladies. They achieve a little success—and then, wh happens? They go here, they go there; their names, their photograp are in all the papers—very good publicity, of course—I don't object it; but they don't *work*."

"That's true, Mr. Memsworth," said Susie eagerly. "But I'm rea to work till I drop, honestly I am. I'm not doing it for fun. I was was born in the profession."

"That's what we want," he said. "As a matter of fact, I was myse Now, second—I found a juvenile lead." He bowed to Jerningham, wh blushed for once in his cool unblushing life. "I know all about hi now, so I needn't say any more. But third—I found a young compos who can write songs that get across and stay there." He turned Inigo. "Do you think you can write some more like those numbe I heard?"

"I should think so," replied Inigo carelessly. He was beginning feel wonderlandish again, what with Mr. Memsworth and the cha pagne. "Any amount."

The great man looked at him in grave astonishment, in which the was perhaps a touch of awe. Here was a very extraordinary you man, who was not at all impressed by the fact that he was about be taken up by a Memsworth. "My word, my boy!" he ejaculated.

"He can too, Mr. Memsworth," cried Susie. "Inigo's marvellous. H can just knock them off like anything."

"Thart is so," said Jerry, with lofty kindness. "You can barnk o Jollifant, Mr. Memsworth. You've nobody writing nambers for yo to tech him."

"And they eat them, even in the stupidest places," Susie continue "You could see that the other night, couldn't you? But p'raps yo ldn't. I was forgetting that wretched rotten business, busting up show."

Ah yes. Curious, that, very curious. I've not seen anything like or years." Mr. Memsworth looked thoughtful. "No, nothing as l for twenty years. I don't know what you people made of it, but me it was obvious, quite obvious. Hooliganism, of course—but or- ised hooliganism. Somebody must have paid them to do that. The se in general was very enthusiastic. I saw that. Then why should se fellows kick up such a row, and go on doing it? Paid to do it. ere for the purpose. I don't know who employed them, I don't ow why they were employed, all I say is they *were* employed, paid do it. I've seen it happen before, though not lately. I've had a lot experience. You take my word for it. Organised rowdyism."

I'm beginning to think that, too," said Susie, "and I know that Mrs. does. I shall tell Miss Trant, don't you think so, Inigo, Jerry?"

Meanwhile—to business," said Mr. Memsworth, looking as if he re about to give his loyal subjects a Constitution. "I take it, then, . Jollifant, you're free to work for me?"

nigo thought so, but put in a word about Felder and Hunterman.

That can be arranged," and Mr. Memsworth waved a hand. "Leave t to me. What I want you to do is to see Julian Jaffery, who's sup- ed to be doing the music for my new show or at least putting some v stuff into it. We should want those numbers I heard the other ht and one or two others, and then you can set to work on another ng I'm planning. I've got most of the book. And I want you, ss Dean, to rehearse a big part—in which you'll be playing opposite . Jerningham here, and you can work together—in this show that's rly ready. You can take Mr. Jollifant's numbers that you're doing w straight into it, though I may get one of my librettists to alter words a bit." He had in hand, it seemed, a splendid new musical nedy, that bore the provisional title, *The Mascot Girl*. It had begun a French farce, but had been taken to Vienna, where it was trans- med into an operetta, which was entirely rewritten in New York a song-and-dance show; and now, the last vestiges of the original t having been removed, new words and music were being introduced that it could blossom out again as an English musical comedy. Mr.

Memsworth told them all about it or at least contrived to suggest th he was telling them all about it, for there was not really much to t It was obvious that the thing would only begin to have a shape at t rehearsal. Nevertheless, it appeared that Susie and Jerry would ha very important parts in it, and that Inigo's tunes would soon be d lighting or worrying the whole country. In short, their fortunes we made, their ships almost in harbour.

"No," cried Susie, her eyes dancing, "I really couldn't eat or drink an thing else. If I did I should be sick, I'm so excited."

"Sweet!" murmured Mrs. Jerningham, and patted her hand.

"But it's—it's—oh, golly!—it's marvellous. Isn't it, Inigo? Don't there, pretending you don't care tuppence. Isn't it marvellous? Are you dizzy?"

"Absolutely," said Inigo, who was in fact a trifle dizzy.

"I don't mind saying it's jerst whort I've warnted," Jerningham a mitted. And he gave his wife such a sudden, unexpected and unask for, altogether beautiful smile that no doubt she felt dizzy too. F smiles like that, she would have bought him whole theatres.

Mr. Memsworth, whom the champagne had made more benevole and regal than ever, so that he sat there like another Haroun al Raschi smiled upon them all, and then explained to Susie and Inigo that th had better clear things up in Gatford and then report to him in tow if possible in two days' time, and on Monday at the latest. Then would have contracts ready and everything.

Susie stared at him in a happy dream. "Oh, Mr. Memsworth, do disappear or anything, will you? I feel as if I'm sitting in my di making this up, just to pass the afternoon. In a minute I shall wa up."

"It's so very nice for you, isn't it?" Mrs. Jerningham cooed.

"Nice! It's—oh, I can't begin. And you've done it, Lady—I mea Mrs. Jerningham, and I'm so glad you've married Jerry and I ho you'll both be happy for ever and ever." And she flung out her han and Jerry shook one, with a solemn "Tharnks, Susie," while his bri squeezed the other, saying: "You know, we've to go up to town t night. All such a rush, isn't it? But I do adore a rush, don't yo my dear?"

'And this," said Inigo, who had just accepted and lit a large cigar that he felt almost vulgarly opulent already, "is the end—the very d—of *The Good Companions*."

Susie's face fell. "Yes, it is, isn't it? I'd forgotten that. Yes, it's all ht laughing, but it's rather sad, really. Why can't we have one nice ng without having to give up another nice thing?"

'That, my dear lady, is Life." Mr. Memsworth did this magnificently.

'I suppose it is, but it's beastly all the same," said Susie. "Oh, and at about the others, Jimmy and the Joes? What are they going do now, poor darlings? Can't you do anything for them, Mr. Memsrth? They're awfully good, really. You didn't get a chance to see em properly the other night."

He shook his head. "I don't doubt it. I wish I could do something them. I'd like to oblige you, Miss Dean, and I like to see people our profession sticking to their friends. But these others—sorry—t in my line. Too old, you know. Much too old even for the chorus. might possibly find a very small part in something or other for the le comedian, but really I think he'd be far better off in his own ncert-party work. And the others certainly would. Sorry, but still, ey'll find work all right. Can't they carry on this present show?"

'Nathing left in it," said Jerry. "All the real tarlent gone."

'No, that's not fair, Jerry," Susie told him. "But there wouldn't be ough of them to do anything with it. I mean, it couldn't be the ne show, now that half of it has gone. Oh, it's a shame. They'll ve to find work with another C. P. and it won't be easy getting into good one 'cos the season's nearly beginning."

Mr. Memsworth looked thoughtful. "The season—the season," he used. "Now that reminds me of something that was said to me the ner day. What was it? Ah, I have it. Bellerby, that's the man. llerby used to do a good deal of work for me at one time, and I n across him the other day in town and he told me he was getting resident concert party together for some resort or other, Eastbourne, astings, one of those places, you know. In fact, he asked me if I uld recommend him a few decent people."

"Oh, but that would be marvellous! Just what they want! Do you ink this man would take them?" Susie asked.

"A word from me," said Mr. Memsworth, and a wave of his hand them the rest.

"But how are you—I mean—will you write to him or somethin

"Mr. Jollifant, just touch that bell, will you?" the great man c manded. This—his manner informed them—was his way of d things, and they must now keep their eyes and ears open. The brought a waiter, and the waiter was told to bring Mr. Nurris, w it appeared was Mr. Memsworth's secretary. Mr. Nurris was a pa young man with darkish horn-rimmed spectacles. "Look here, N ris," cried his employer. "Can you remember Bellerby's address? Y remember him? South coast somewhere. You can, eh? Then tak wire. Wait a minute, though. I must be out of this town by f It's no use him wiring back to me. Who'll act for these four peopl he asked Susie and Inigo.

They gave him Jimmy's name and address. Thereupon, Mr. Me worth dictated a telegram of theatrical dimensions, recommending comedian, one conjurer-banjoist, one baritone and feed, and contra all experienced C. P. artistes, and asking for terms, dates, and ot details, to be wired to Jimmy Nunn. "And if that doesn't brin reply by tonight, you may take it from me that Bellerby is either dru or missing or both. Get it off at once, Nurris."

"And now," said Susie to Inigo, after they had shaken hands round and declared how splendid it all was and taken their leave, looks as if we're all going to be fixed up. Aren't you excited? Hones I'm nearly ill. I want to rush up to everybody and tell them all ab it. Just think of us sitting there this morning—me, anyhow—givi it all up as a bad job. And then this comes along. Wouldn't it ghastly if I got run over or something now?" She squeezed his ar hard, then let it go and laughed.

"You've forgotten two people," he told her, after she had finish happily babbling. "One is Miss Trant."

"I'm going to see her now, to tell her all the news. And I'm su she won't mind a bit. I believe she'll be glad. And I shall tell h to keep all my benefit money, to help to pay the damages they s they're going to claim at the measly Hippodrome. It'll all help, wo it?"

\ spot," he replied. "Those damages are going to be a nasty piece /ork. I don't like the idea of poor Miss Trant being left here, with ıd arm and a bill a mile long, while we trot off to town to make fortunes."

f you put it like that—and I must say, Inigo, you've a nasty way ›utting things—it sounds nearly as bad as murder. But it'll be all t. Everything's going to be all right for everybody, I feel sure it I've felt so all along. The trouble about you, my laddie, is you've confidence——"

Vell, by gosh! I like that," he protested, "when it's only a few hours e you were moping away——"

)on't talk such rot, Inigo. That's the worst of you. You talk ı a lot of rot. It must be because you're—what is it?—an author— something worse than that—a man of let-ters. No, don't start being s now, or you'll spoil everything. Who's the other one I've foren?"

)ur Mr. Oakroyd."

ess, lad. So I had," she cried. "What a shame! I haven't seen for days. Have you? Oh, something nice *must* happen to him, ally must. We can't all just leave him, alone with his bag of tools his little basket thing. Do you remember his little basket trunk? n't it sweet? He's been a bit broody lately too, so p'raps he wants ange like the rest of us. Well, I'm sure it'll be easy to find him a We could take him with us, or the others might be able to find something if they get that resident job, or Miss Trant might want to stay with her."

Vhy, what could she give him to do? What's she going to do heranyhow?"

)h, I don't know. Don't be so silly and impatient, young man. l, this is where we part. I'm going to see Miss Trant. I don't know t she'll think about me. Do I look all right, because honestly I tight, though I only had one glass of that champagne? And you along and write another song or two, just to keep your hand in. run away. Isn't it marvellous? See you soon."

Vhen?"

Tonight—perhaps."

He watched her dart across the road and then trip away down
other side, so eager, so happy, like a girl in a shining fairy tal
almost hurt him to see her like that. Something old, unreason
stirred apprehensively inside him—a little Inigo that had once looke
from his bone and his bride to see the trampling mastodon blo
out the sky. Then he grinned at himself and walked away.

IV

Once more we discover Mrs. Joe in her sitting-room, surrounded by
brown cotton-woolly moors and glens that haunted the imaginatio
Mrs. Pennyfeather's uncle. Mrs. Joe is still knitting that mysterious
garment, which is now more complicated and untidier than ever.
had knitted steadily through these dark idle days, and it looks
there is a danger of her knitting herself inside this pink monster
having to be rescued with a pair of shears. We have never preten
that she was young, but now, as she sits there, working away, she l
older than she did. In that mask of mingled dignity and simple
ishness, there has been a recent invasion of fine lines; her face be
to droop and sag. This past week she has suffered as an artist
wife, and a mother—for though George is safe on Denmark Hill
has to be paid for, and his passion for playing football in side-st
with a little india-rubber ball is creating a terrible boot problem.
doubt she is thinking about these things, the bewildering mechanic
life, as she stares into the microscopic fire, itself evidence enough of
Brundit new economic policy. For a few minutes, during which we
do well to look upon her with kindness, for very soon, this very n
in fact, she is going her way and we are going ours and the acquaint
is at an end, she sits and stares and weaves the monstrous mesh. T
she starts up. Somebody has burst into the room. It is Susie.

Susie takes a deep breath, plucks off her hat and flings it anyw
takes another deep breath, and falls into a chair.

"You did give me a Start, my dear," Mrs. Joe tells her, repro
fully. "I wondered what on earth it could be."

And now Susie begins: "Talk about news! My dear, I'm si
bursting with 'em. Jerry's married Lady Partlit, the woman I told
about, who sent the bouquet, and I've seen them both, had lunch

ı, and Mr. Memsworth, the Emperor, you know, the musical-edy man, he was there too, and we're all going to London and / and I are going to have parts, really fat parts, in a new show he's g, and Inigo's going to write the music, and Mr. Memsworth's d to a man who's getting up a resident C. P. somewhere——"

top it, child, stop it," Mrs. Joe shrieks. "You're putting me in a e, with your Lady Partridges and Emperors. I don't know whether sitting in this room or where I am. Now just calm yourself down get your breath and begin at the beginning and let me take it n."

Vell, you see——"

ut, Susie my dear, you're not teasing me, are you? I mean, you're just making it all up. I couldn't bear that just now. Some other , perhaps, it would be just a little fun and frolic between ourselves body can say I don't like a little joking in a friendly way—but just , what with all things being at Sixes and Sevens, no, worse than if you count in the injuries and loss of salaries, to say nothing of re engagements, that is, whether there'll be any at all and if so, re—I really couldn't bear it. So don't tell me anything you're making up, will you?"

Iaking it up! I couldn't make it up. Nobody could. Just you ı and don't say a word." After which, Mrs. Joe does listen, en-ced, to a very full account of the lunch.

)id you ever!" cried Mrs. Joe. "I never did. There's your Chance, e at last, you might say, when hope had fled. Doesn't it show you? words, it does." She is almost aghast at this revelation of her hetic powers. "There was I, on Saturday, saying to you when you me that Mortimer man was there, 'What did I tell you? Here's Chance, come to you, without asking, in Gatford.' And then n nothing came of it—and the things I've said to Joe about what id that night really won't bear thinking of, not in cold blood—when ing came of it, I could have slapped myself for Leading You On. 've only gone and made it worse, you silly creature,' I said to my-And yet something told me. Try as I might, it still told me. now here you are, with a Bigger Chance. And it had to come, if it took a marriage no more expected than the Man in the Moon to do it, you might say. It—it—a thing like this—makes you ask y self, Where Are We?—What Are We?—if you see what I mean." loses herself in these profundities for a moment or two. Then throws aside all her knitting and needles and balls of wool. "I'm g I'm very very glad, my dear. I know it means breaking up and start afresh somewhere else for us, with the season so near too, but I'm glad, just for your own sake, my dear." And she leans forward kisses her young friend's flushed face.

"But, you stupid, I've news for you too," Susie points out.

"Anything I'm sure will be welcome," Mrs. Joe replies. Then adds, a trifle wistfully: "There hasn't been anything said about has there?"

"Of course there has. That's what I'm trying to tell you." A out it comes, to delight Mrs. Joe.

"Though," she is careful to say, "as things go in the ordinary wa and unless Luckiness has set in all round—it's only a Shot in the D so far. A manager says he wants artistes for a resident season at of our best resorts. He says it once. Well and good! He may it twice. Twice is quite possible. But after that, he's not going say it any more—and why? Because he's got the artistes. They floc in, my dear, flocked. They don't need to be told twice. You do what I mean, don't you? He told Mr. Memsworth about this some d ago—perhaps a week ago, perhaps longer—and if he's told other peo he's already had the choice of a hundred. To ask for artistes fo good resident season," she adds solemnly, "is like—well, you might well ask for haystacks for a needle."

"Oh, he may not have booked anybody," Susie remarks, rather c lessly. "Anyhow, we'll soon see. He was told to wire a reply Jimmy."

"Joe's over there now. Went to discuss the situation, and so I told h 'Very well, but if it's to be a discussion, stay in the rooms and h something in. Send Out for a bottle or two of beer and leave it at t and don't go discussing on licenced premises, because that's how money goes. That's a thing to watch when you're married, my d Always get him to Send Out for something and do his discussing home."

usie laughs. "I'll remember that, though it doesn't matter because on't intend ever to get married."

Don't tell me, because I know how you feel. I was just the same our age. But then—all of a sudden, before you can say Jack Robin-—it comes over you."

think I know somebody it's coming over now," Susie tells her fidentially. "And that's Miss Trant."

No!"

Yes. I've just seen her. And I found him there, the great *him*, n't I ever tell you about that Scotch doctor she's been quietly in with for ages?" To make sure of the matter, she tells her now. d there he was the day," she concludes, employing what passes in trical circles for a good Scots accent, "looking into herrr eyes and n' herrr Eleezabeth. He's verra tall an' verra bony an' verra seerious, wi' a nice kind face. An' if he's not proposin' marritch the morn's n an' if she's no gladly acceptin' him, ah'll go an' eat ma best bonnet. ts, woman, it's a—oh, I can't do any more, but anyhow there they falling in love all over again like billy-oh, and blushing away every they look at one another. And Miss Trant pretends to be very ied about what we're all going to do, and about the show busting and about all this money she may have to pay out, but she doesn't a damn, really. I could see it in her eye. What she's thinking about is her Doctorr McFarlane, ye ken. And good luck to her, the ng, I say."

o do I, indeed I do." Mrs. Joe reflects for a moment. "It's a noble ession, though I must say I could never fancy one of them. Don't feel that too, my dear? I mean, as soon as you said anything to them in their place a bit, they'd say, 'Let me look at your tongue,' then where would you be? Besides, think of being married to a who knew everything that was going on inside you, all about your and everything! You'd never be able to look him in the face. nember a doctor—well, he wasn't quite a doctor but he was going to ne—a medical student, you know—and he was very attached to me, ıldn't keep him away—this was before I met Joe, long before, when t went on the stage—and he was very good-looking and most amus-ompany, but one Sunday night, when he'd had a little too much—

we'd been out to Richmond, I remember, and it was a very hot —and he told me what he'd been doing to a rabbit—it was a dead rab but still—well, I never fancied him after that. I didn't like the l in his eye. But Miss Trant, I dare say, is different. You feel—d you, my dear?—she wouldn't care about a thing like that. It's all T perament."

But now there are noises off. Enter three gentlemen, carrying bot ale.

"Has Susie told you?" Joe roars at his wife. "Well, Jimmy's had a wire. We've just left him." He rubs his hands and shows a long slow delighted grin.

"What does he say then?" Mrs. Joe demands, impatiently. "D stand there, without a word. Of all the aggravating men, Joe——!"

"Wants to see us on Monday," Mr. Morton Mitcham tells her. "Te are good. Open middle of April, clean run through until end of S tember. Rehearse beginning of April, on full pay. And if it's the s Bellerby I played with in Nought Six, he's a gentleman."

"Bit of your doing, this, Susie," Joe roars again. "I've heard all ab you. After this, up among the stars so high, eh? Shan't be allo to talk to you after this week."

"Don't be an idiot, Joe. But honestly, isn't it marvellous?"

"Splendiferous! And what do you say to me for giving that ot fellow a tap on the jaw? Don't forget us, will you?"

"As if I should!"

He gives her a gigantic hug. Mrs. Joe and Mr. Mitcham explai one another, with the ease and rapidity of veterans, the advantages o resident season on the South coast. Inigo discovers some tumb on the sideboard and opens the beer. The gentlemen immediately to drinking healths and Mrs. Joe admits that at this moment she co do with "something sharp." Susie, perched on the edge of the ta exchanges smiles with Inigo, because the others seem so happy. So body wants to know where Mr. Oakroyd is, and nobody is able to su the information. Everybody, however, has so much to say and is eager to say it that Mr. Oakroyd, who after all has not disappea into the blue, is soon forgotten. Susie has accepted a cigarette, Joe a Inigo have their pipes, Mr. Mitcham has brought out one of his fam roots, so that now the room is full of smoke. Thus we see them ough a blue haze: Mr. Morton Mitcham, towering, fantastic, less like roken-down senator than he was when we first met him at Dulling- n Junction, but still the same conglomeration of creaking bone, bend- brow, and retreating hair, the same traveller from unimaginable ces; Mrs. Joe, flushed, almost sparkling now, ten years younger than was an hour ago, talking away and sipping her bottled beer but ready at any moment to play the Duchess of Dorking; the great ulders and honest beaming face of Joe himself, as he nods and grins agrees with everybody; Inigo of the wandering nose and wandering of hair, at once clean and untidy in the pleasant undergraduate ion that remains with some men; and Susie, swinging her legs at table's edge, turning eagerly from one to another of her companions, ing, laughing, teasing, fooling, as if those dark eyes of hers would ten thousand years of life undimmed. In another moment they will othing but names and news. We see them through this haze, which kens, deepens, shredding away colour, blurring shape, like Time f flowing mistily away; and then the curtain comes rustling down, now we cannot see them at all and perhaps will never see them n.

V

l what was Mr. Oakroyd doing all this time? What has kept him e background? The answer is—a new part. For the first and last in his life, Mr. Oakroyd played the detective, a rôle for which—being a reader of sensational fiction—he had no particular liking ptitude. But the great catastrophe had left him darkly brooding, after innumerable pipes of *Old Salt* and some talk with his friend, Jock Campbell, a man compact of suspicion, he had begun to put and two together. Thus it came about that he played the detective, we shall soon discover to what purpose if we wait for him in Miss t's room at the nursing home, on the morning of the day when and Inigo were due to depart to London, and even Mrs. Joe and others were thinking seriously about packing.

iss Trant was still in the nursing home, but if she had been in a y to leave it, she could have done so. She preferred, however, to stay on until her arm was completely better, to the great content of her n medical adviser, Dr. Hugh McFarlane, who contrived to visit her ev day. He had now gone into the matter of the Hippodrome clai with Mr. Gooch, and this meant, of course, that he had to see her often as possible, whatever might happen to a good general pract and the parathyroid glands. Having completely recovered from t shock, Miss Trant was now able to get up, but for the time bei she was keeping to her room. When Hugh called, on this particu morning, he found her sitting in an armchair.

"I telephoned to Gooch," he explained, "and he's coming along see you. Something very special, he says. I don't know that I c stay for long, but he'll tell you all about it, Elizabeth."

"It's a shame, your doing so much," she told him. "I'm sure y can't spare the time. You mustn't bother any more about it, Hug

And he replied that it was no trouble at all, and she said she w sure it must be, and he replied again, quite gruffly, that it was a pl ure, and by this time their eyes had joined in the dialogue and w making the most reckless remarks to one another, so that though th tongues had framed only the most innocent friendly syllables, she w bright pink and he was brick red. Shy people can engage in t commerce for quite a long time before anything decisive happens, a it is not a stage of the passion that has any interest at all for o siders (though Miss Trant's nurse, who had followed every m noted every blush, and taken the temperature of the affair each d must be excepted), so that we can safely withdraw to await the arri of Mr. Gooch.

Mr. Gooch was a solicitor with a very large practice and als marked Midlands accent. These two things taken together indicate t he was an unusually astute man who knew a great deal about ev body in Gatford, Mundley and Stort. Miss Trant's family solici Mr. Truby of Cheltenham, would not have approved of Mr. Gooch all, but then Mr. Truby would have been afraid to contest claims t Mr. Gooch regarded as mere whims, impudent triflings. Hugh's Sco instinct for a good fighting lawyer had not been at fault when it h taken him to Mr. Gooch. For the rest, it only remains to be s that Mr. Gooch was not at all sharp, wizened, ferret-faced, but a st ubicund man with an enormous flat face that suggested nothing but sleepy good-humour.

Having bluntly told Miss Trant that he was pleased to meet her and ad to see she was sitting up, Mr. Gooch came at once to business. Now, Miss Trant," he began, "I've looked into this matter. I thought first it was a hopeless job. You can't deny your liability, you see. ve had a look at your agreement with the Hippodrome, and your bility's there all right. Of course you never thought of anything this sort happening, did you?"

"Naturally not," Miss Trant replied. "Who would? I mean, it's t the kind of thing that does happen, you see."

"Quite so," said Mr. Gooch, creasing his vast face. "Only you've t to be prepared for anything in this world. That's what agreements d contracts are for. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred they're ly time and money thrown away, but there's always the hundredth. is is it. It's a pity you put your name to that agreement, Miss Trant, you don't mind me saying so. These theatrical lettings are out of line—and I don't pretend to know a lot about 'em—but that one signed doesn't look right to me, smells fishy, that one. And that's ng to be worth looking into, I fancy—afterwards, just to make a of mischief. But it's watertight, no mistake about that. You're le, and when they claim, you'll have to pay up." Having said this, looked at her in a manner that suggested he was quite pleased ut it.

iss Trant was not pleased and came to the conclusion that Mr. ch was a fool. "It's a shame," she cried. "I wouldn't care if it was fault in any way. But it wasn't, as you know, and I've had to er anyhow. I and my party have lost money, you see, quite apart n anything I may have to pay. And then we've suffered in other s too. And all because a few hooligans were determined to spoil performance."

ere Dr. McFarlane muttered something that hinted what he would o such fellows if he caught them. It may have concerned their thyroid glands.

uite so," said Mr. Gooch again, still smiling good-humouredly. though we might whittle the claim down a bit when it comes—it hasn't come yet, you know, but it's on its way, you might say—we ca contest it. I want to make you understand that, Miss Trant. Tha clear, isn't it? All right, then that's settled."

He still seemed very pleased with himself, and Miss Trant beg to think that even poor Mr. Truby, though he may have been thinki for months she was wrong in her head, could have done better th this. And what made it much worse was that he was Hugh's choi Poor Hugh!—he had looked so knowing about his Mr. Gooch.

"But there's another point," Mr. Gooch continued, with relish, "a this is where we really come in. You're responsible to them, all rig But who's responsible to you? Who, in fact, is the guilty party?" paused and looked at her expectantly.

She gave a mental if not an actual shrug. "That's soon settled to she replied, not without irony, "but it doesn't help much. A ga of roughs—from nowhere. If it hadn't been for them, nothing wou have happened. But what good will that do us—I mean, knowing th Oh—it's all stupid! I'm sorry, but it really is."

"It might turn out stupid for somebody," said Mr. Gooch, who quite unperturbed, "but it's not half so stupid as it looks. Quite tri up to a point, in fact—quite tricky. I didn't want to bother you now with all this, but I thought you'd better know the line I'm taki If you don't mind waiting a minute, I'll just see if he's here. I a message for him to come along." With that, he lumbered out, leav Miss Trant staring at her companion.

"I don't understand what he's talking about," she confessed, frowni "Is he—really—a reliable man?"

Hugh laughed. "I've been watching you, Elizabeth. I saw thought he wasn't going to be any use to you."

"No, that's not fair, I didn't. Only——"

"Just wait. He's here."

He was and there was somebody with him. It was Mr. Oakr tightly clutching his cap and looking very embarrassed. He her a very uneasy grin.

"Well, Mr. Oakroyd," and she smiled, "this is very nice. I di expect to see you."

Mr. Oakroyd cleared his throat. "Ar yer getting on, Miss Tra

“Very well, thank you. What have you been doing lately?”

“Well—er—I've been busy—like.” And he nodded towards Mr. ooch.

“Oh!” cried Miss Trant. “I didn't understand. You've come here h Mr. Gooch, have you?”

“That's right,” replied Mr. Oakroyd, more at ease now. “Any rate, left word for me to come here. Said I'd better tell yer mysen.”

And you got hold of the other chap,” Mr. Gooch enquired, putting head on one side in a droll fashion, “made sure of him, did you?”

He's here,” said Mr. Oakroyd, jerking a thumb over his shoulder.

He's here, is he?” Mr. Gooch was quite lively. “Where? Outside?”

On t'mat,” replied Mr. Oakroyd, grinning. “D'you want him in?”

If Miss Trant doesn't mind,” said Mr. Gooch, glancing at her.

Of course I don't mind,” said Miss Trant, staring at them. “But at is it all about?” And she suddenly began to laugh.

It's like this here, Miss Trant,” Mr. Oakroyd began, earnestly. “After there do o' Saturday, I begins to put two an' two together. There'd summat up all t'week, though it were nowt to Saturday. Saturday ped t'lot, as yer knaw very well. Nar there's one or two had said ne they thowt it were a put-up job, them chaps makking all that to-do. dn't like look on it at all, I didn't. So I puts my thinking cap on.”

That's the way,” said Mr. Gooch approvingly. “Thinking cap.”

Nar a friend o' mine that doesn't belong here but 'ud been here a this chap 'ud dropped a remark to me when I saw him last week were in t'*Market Tavern* o' Thursday—an' when I towd him I was wi' *T'Good Companions,* then he says ‘You had any bother lately, you're going to have some right sharp?’ Summat like that, he says. ll, I didn't tak' much notice on it at time, an' he were off afore I d say owt. So I lets it drop, you might say. But t'other day, o' nday it wor, when I begins to puzzle it out a bit, I thowt ‘Ar did he w we'd have some bother?’ He'd said we would have and—by gow! e'd had some bother an' all. So I puts two an' two together. I vt to mysen ‘He's in t'know, he is. If this here's a put-up job, he's where they've been putting it up, as you might say.’ That's what owt.”

Mr. Gooch wagged his huge head at Miss Trant. "That's the wa he said once more. "Thinking cap again."

Miss Trant was interested now. "Go on, Mr. Oakroyd. This is e citing."

"So I sets off to look for him, this here friend o' mine. Any ra I maks a few enquiries. Meantime, I goes to see Jimmy Nunn, a he tells me what Soosie towd him about Doctor McFarlane here goi to Mr. Goodge about this here job, so I goes to Mr. Goodge an' all a tells him what I think about it an' he says there might be summat in an' I'd better keep on looking for this friend o' mine, d'you see. 'I do what I can,' he says, 'to help you to find him. What's he lik he says. An' I tells him, an' off I goes again an' comes on one ch 'at 'ud seen him an' he puts me on to another chap. Eh, it were business! But at finish up, I finds him."

"Was he here in Gatford?" Miss Trant asked.

"Here! He wor fowty mile away an' just settin' off to go anot fowty or fifty. He's allus on t'move," he added, not without pri "I were wi' him one time—on t'road. If I hadn't been, he would ha' come back. He worn't set on it—'cos he didn't want to be mi up in t'job—but he come o' t'finish, being a pal o' mine."

"Well, we'd better have him in now," said Mr. Gooch, "unless M Trant doesn't want to be bothered. You can leave it all to me, y know, Miss Trant, but I thought you might like to hear what he h to say."

"I should think so!" cried Miss Trant. "Hurry up and bring h before he runs away."

"Nay, he'll noan do that," said Mr. Oakroyd, almost reproachfu "I'll fetch him." And off he went.

"And you really think there's something in this?" said Dr. McF lane, looking anxiously at Mr. Gooch.

"I'm pretty sure there is," that gentleman replied, smiling and h closing his eyes. "Pre-tty sure there is." Then he opened his eyes, wi "But I can't tell you exactly what—not yet."

"Well, whether there is or not," cried Miss Trant excitedly, "it's lov And I hope there is, just for Mr. Oakroyd's sake. I've told you ab him, haven't I, Hugh?"

"This is him," said Mr. Oakroyd, returning at that moment, "Joby
kson. Nar, Joby lad, yer can tell 'em yersen."

Our old friend, Mr. Jackson looked from one to another of his audi-
ce and rubbed his chin dubiously. We see him for a moment robbed
that bright confidence which was part of his charm.

'Now then?" said Mr. Gooch.

'It's like this," said Joby hoarsely. "Yer not making a police-court
o' this, are yer? If y'are, I want to keep out, see? Anything
oblige a pal—an' anyhow they did the dirty on yer—but I don't want
be put in a little box with a clever bloke on the other side saying
nd where were you on the fourteenth of July last?' No witnessing
me. Oh no! I'll tell yer what I know for George 'ere, but yer
n't put me in the box, see?"

There isn't going to be a box; don't worry," said Mr. Gooch. "It
't that sort of business at all."

Good enough then," said Joby, hesitating no longer and speaking
h more freedom. "What yer want to know is 'ow did I come to
ow there might be a bit o' bother, that's it, isn't it? Right." He
ised, gave a sharp glance round, thoroughly enjoying the situation.
'ell, I'm 'ere in Gatford, see. One morning in a boozer—not the
rket Tavern, lower class of 'ouse altogether—tell yer its moniker in
ninute—the *Black Bull,* that's it. Know it?"

Ir. Gooch pondered for a moment. "Corner of Castle Street," he
l finally. "Little place. Nearly got its licence taken away last year."

That's the place," said Joby. "Well, I'm in there, see—one morn-
, havin' one with some o' the lads. When I say some o' the lads,
on't mean they was pals o' mine. But I knew some of 'em. Matter
act, some of 'em was on the road, same as meself. They wasn't
kin' just then, 'cos Gorley's place is near 'ere, see—an' Gorley's
feller that owns some o' them Cock'rels and Swishbacks—and they
'ere, waitin' for the engines to be over'aulded, see. The other
ers I didn't know—local fellers, they was, all in a click, y'know, a
g, with about the price of a pint between the lot of 'em. Well
e we are—when in comes a feller, a biggish bloke, all dressed up,
rt feller. One or two o' the lads knows 'im, see, same as if they'd
e a bit o' work for 'im one time, when they *did* work. This feller

then looks us over, nods ’ere an’ there, very friendly like, calls the lan lord an’ orders drinks all round. Sensation in court! Then when t landlord’s gone and we’re all well into the pig’s ear, he sort o’ gath us round like an’ says quietly ‘Any o’ you fellers like to earn some e money?’ ‘What’s the idear?’ we want to know. ‘Only a bit of a jo on my part,’ ’e says, ‘just payin’ somebody off,’ ’e says, ‘an’ money f nothing for some o’ you lads.’ He didn’t look a money for nothi bloke to me, I don’t mind tellin’ yer, an’ when ’e says, ‘Before we any further, who’s game?’, I didn’t catch on, see. I thought ‘I do like the look of you, chum. Bit too careful about your joke. T much lookin’ over the shoulder.’ So me an’ two or three more was in it, see, an’ we sits in the other corner, tryin’ to look as if we was still drinkin’ the beer he paid for. ’E whispers for about ten minut then slings it. But I got a word or two, something about a show the Hip. When ’e goes, the other fellers lets on then, see. ‘Why do yer come in?’ they says to us. ‘Quid each for sittin’ at the back o’ t Hip. an’ giving ’em the bird, an’ p’raps another quid for Saturday if pans out all right,’ they says——”

“And those were the men then,” Miss Trant gasped. “But wh I don’t understand. Who was this man?”

“Now we come to it,” said Mr. Gooch. “Who was he?”

“I ’eard ’is name,” Joby replied slowly, “ ’cos, as I say, some of ’ knew ’im——”

“Good! And what was it?”

“That’s it. I’ve forgotten it. Clean gone. An’ me with a memo my God! that’s won me more pints o’ beer in bets than you cou swallow from now to——”

“Come along,” said Mr. Gooch. “This won’t do, you know. Y might as well give us the name now. It’s just that we want.”

“It’s no good yer coming along me,” cried Joby aggressively. “ can come along till yer blue an’ it won’t make no diff’rence. I’ve tr to remember that feller’s moniker all day. ’Ere, George, you can ’em. Wasn’t I tryin’ to remember it all along the road ’ere?”

“Ay, yer wor, Joby,” Mr. Oakroyd replied mournfully. It beg to look as if he had had all his trouble for nothing.

"Well, can't you remember anything about him?" said Mr. Gooch, ho looked neither sleepy nor good-humoured now.

"Let's see. 'Alf a minute. Biggish bloke. Clean-shaved. Reddish ce. Baggy under the eyes, poached-egg style. Too much whisky." ut that did not seem to help much, for Gatford and district could ast of dozens of middle-aged gentlemen exactly like that. Then Joby membered something else. "'Ere, 'alf a minute. Pitchers! Some- ing to do with pitchers."

"Pitchers?" Mr. Gooch stared at him.

"That's ri'. Yer know, films, cinemas!"

"Ah!" Mr. Gooch sounded triumphant. "Was his name Ridvers?"

"You've got it, chum," shouted Joby, in great excitement. "You've t it in one. Ridvers, that's it. Now 'ow the—I mean—'ow did I me to forget that? Ridvers. That's it all right an' no mistake. Do r know 'im, Mister?"

'I know Mr. Ridvers," Mr. Gooch replied, a trifly grimly, "and Mr. dvers knows me. I don't think I shall have a lot of trouble with r. Ridvers. I happen to know he's trying to sell his three cinema halls a big syndicate. In fact, I know a lot about Mr. Ridvers. And w I know a bit more, don't I? Well, well! Hello!" He stared Miss Trant, who was wrinkling her brow. "Do you know him o?"

'I'm just trying to think. There was a man, a horrid man, pushed s way into my room at the hotel one afternoon, two or three weeks o, and he said he had something to do with cinemas here. He was fully rude and disagreeable—a beast of a man—and so I wouldn't en to him, just told him to go. And I heard afterwards that some the men in the party had some trouble with him after that, down- irs. I'm sure that must be the same man."

'So am I," said Mr. Gooch.

'I've a mind to call on this Ridvers," Dr. McFarlane began, looking y fierce.

'Leave him to me, Doctor, leave him to me," said Mr. Gooch. "I'll end to him. He's had his little joke, and this is where he pays for ' He turned to Joby. "And don't you worry about courts of law. is won't get that far, if I know Mr. Ridvers. But I tell you what you can do, my lad, and I'll see you don't lose by it. You can jus give me as many names of those other fellows as you can remembe That'll help us to show Mr. Ridvers we know all about his little games. He whipped out paper and pencil and took Joby aside.

"Well done, Mr. Oakroyd!" said Dr. McFarlane, shaking him b the hand. "That's fine."

"Isn't it?" cried Miss Trant. "Whatever happens, I'm very ver grateful to you. You've been wonderful, finding all this out for us.

"Nay, I've done nowt. It's Joby who'll ha' done t'trick."

"No, it's you really, and I can't tell you how grateful I am. An listen, I've been wanting to talk to you, now that we've all broken u Aren't you sorry?"

"Eh, I am, Miss Trant. I don't like thowt on us all leavin' on another, I don't. Ther's Soos an' Inigo off this afternoon—I'm o to t'station wi' 'em if I can get—an' though I'm right glad they'r doing so well, I'll be right sorry to see 'em go, I will that. Eh, we'v had wer bit o' fun together, three on us."

"But tell me," said Miss Trant, looking at him very earnestly, "wh are you going to do? I've been wanting to talk to you about that."

"Nay, I've been so throng wi' this business, I don't fairly kna Ther's been a bit o' talk about it. Soos wants me to go to London afor so long, 'cos she fancies she can get me summat to do there. A Joe says if I went wi' them, p'raps ther'd be a job there——"

"And I don't know exactly what I'm going to do," she said, "bu that's what I was going to say to you too. But look here, will you tal to the others seriously today, and then come to see me—let me see— tomorrow morning sometime, and then we can talk about it properl Will you do that?"

"Ay, I will," said Mr. Oakroyd solemnly, and then awkwardly too his leave of her. But he did not talk it over with the others and h did not call upon her the next morning.

"Yer mun come an' have a bit o' dinner wi' me, Joby lad," he sai as they left the nursing home in triumph. "I towd t'landlady yer migh —she's a right good sort is this, an' I've been there a time nar—a she'll have it ready."

"I'm with yer, George," said Joby in great content. He had bee omised a reward for his services by Mr. Gooch, and, reward or no ward, had enjoyed his morning.

They had hardly set foot in the house, however, before the landlady shed up and thrust something in Mr. Oakroyd's face, just as if it d been there some time and she was anxious to get rid of it, fearing at it would explode at any moment. And indeed this is indeed extly what she felt, for the thing she handed over was a telegram. At e sight of it Mr. Oakroyd's triumphant morning crashed to smitheens. "By gow!" he muttered, staring.

It was Joby's turn to read it now. *Come at once mother bad. Leonard.* e made a little clucking noise. "That's ruddy 'ard lines, George," said, seriously, sympathetically. "The old trouble-and-strife, eh? d, eh? Aw, that's rotten, George. 'Ope for the best, though."

'I knew ther were summat. I did, I knew," Mr. Oakroyd was muting. Then he looked at Joby. "I mun be off soon as I can. When's ext train up there, lad?"

oby knew, for he was an authority on trains. There was one in the ddle of the afternoon, and this gave him time after dinner to scrawl Bruddersford address and a few words of explanation on a bit of per, to be conveyed to Miss Trant by "t'landlady's little lad," to put things together and settle his bill, to hurry round and say good-bye Susie and Inigo. There was no time to see the others, but perhaps y would not be gone when he returned, if he did return. Joby nt with him to the station, though his own train did not go until e o'clock.

All the best, George. An' don't forget—Joby Jackson, *World's Fair* inds me ev'ry time, see. Keep smilin'."

So long, Joby lad. See thee again some day. On t'road, eh?"

And then the train went roaring North.

Chapter Six

MR. OAKROYD GOES HOME

I

It was deep dusk when Mr. Oakroyd's train arrived at Black Mo Junction. He could see the street lamps twinkling on the hills, an here and there trams crawling up and down like golden beetles. Th train stopped several minutes at Black Moor, as it always does, an then, having lost all its enthusiasm, it slowly chuff-chuffed into th gloom until at last it came to a standstill in Bruddersford Station. M Oakroyd stepped out, carrying the small suit-case that for some tim now had replaced the famous little basket trunk, and made his wa to the exit with all the easy despatch of a travelled man. He coul dismiss railway stations with a glance now, having been so long an so far on the road, all the autumn and winter, from Sandybay as f up as Middleford. This was really the first time he had come bac to Bruddersford since he began his travels, for though he had visite Ogden Street just after Christmas, he had only gone by tram fro Luddenstall, and that did not count. He had often seen himself co ing back like this, arriving by train and so on, having a bit of a holida like, smoking a leisurely pipe in Woolgate long after everybody else ha clattered off to work, slipping round to the Working Men's Club night to tell some of the chaps where he had been and what he ha seen. But now it was all different. This trip had a shaky and darkis look about it. As he crossed the end of Market Street to get int Woolgate, the great black tower of the Town Hall jerkily shook ou the notes of *Tom Bowling,* a very melancholy tune on the chimes. M Oakroyd had never admired it, but now he suddenly decided he hate it. How folk put up with such a din was a mystery.

"Here, lad," he cried, at the corner of Woolgate, " 'ave you go

Evening Express?" Buying a paper made him feel a little more cheer-l.

Walking up Woolgate, he had a shock. Buttershaw's, the tripe and usic shop, was closed, empty, to let. Something must have happened ere. When was it he had been talking to Mrs. Buttershaw, some-ing about Lily and how she used to go there for pantomime songs? es, on a tram, it was, one Saturday. And Joe Buttershaw had been ere five-and-twenty year to his knowledge; everybody knew Joe's; d now it wasn't there. It made everything look uncertain, strange, if half the street had gone.

Not a sign of anybody in at 51. It was hardly time for Leonard be home, if he was still working at Gregson's, but it did not look if anybody was there. He knocked, though he knew somehow be-re he put his hand to the door that it was useless, for the place had real shut-up look about it.

"Eh, it's Mr. Oakroyd!" Mrs. Sugden was looking out of the house xt door. "Just a minute, Mr. Oakroyd. I've got t'key."

She opened the door and marched in with him. There was a bit of e in the grate, and the table was laid for a late tea. Mrs. Sugden, ppily bustling about the room, talked with gusto. "Did your Leonard nd for yer? I told him he'd 'ave to send. And I've been doing a t o' tidying up for him, an' getting him his tea. A lad like that can't ok after hissen, can he? An' I've been right sorry for him, I 'ave."

Mr. Oakroyd, very uneasy now, asked where his wife was.

"Eh, didn't your Leonard tell yer?" cried Mrs. Sugden, staring at m. "She's in t'Infirmary. They took her away—eh, when was it—iday or Saturday—ay, it were Friday 'cos I were just paying me in-rance, I'd got t'book in me 'and, when they come for her. They l t'operate right sharp—eh, she were that bad. She's left it so long. e's been badly for weeks and weeks. Got a pain 'ere." Mrs. Sug-n put a hand on her ample side. "I could see she were bad. 'Eh,' says, 'yer can't let it go like that, yer mun see t'doctor.' 'No doctors me, Mrs. Sugden,' she says. 'I can manage.' Ay, that's just what said, 'I can manage.' An' I could see wi' me own eyes she were d. At t'upshot, I calls to your Leonard—that were t'beginning o' last ek—an' I says to 'im, 'Eh, Leonard, you'll ha' to mak' your mother see t'doctor. It's no way o' going on, this isn't. She's poorly.' think she is,' he says, 'though she's said nowt to me.' 'I knaw she I says. 'I'll get one,' he says. But no doctor come that day nor t'd after. Next morning she couldn't get up out o' bed, she were that b an' I come in for a bit an' your Leonard fetched t'doctor to her, a he said they'd 'ave t'operate soon as they could. It were owd Doct Mackintosh—'im 'at sees 'em at t'club—an'—eh!—he wor in a state ab 'er. Nivver seen him in sich a stew. He were fairly boiling an' swee ing."

"What's it she's got?" asked Mr. Oakroyd. His voice was so hoar that he had to clear his throat and repeat the question.

"It's summat like appendis," replied Mrs. Sugden, "only it's farth on like. Your Leonard said summat about perry—perrytotitis, but couldn't quite mak' it out."

"And what about this here operation, did it come off all right?"

"Oh, they operated, straight off. They 'ad to. Eh, I believe sh 'ad another sin' then, Mr. Oakroyd. I believe she 'as," Mrs. Sugd added, with mournful gusto.

He stared at her in horror. "She—she mun be bad then," he sta mered finally.

"Eh, she is, poor soul! Your Leonard's nobbut seen her once, a I 'aven't set eyes on her sin' she were ta'en away, but Mrs. Flather- her little lass is in—towed me she were in a bad way, one o' nurs 'ad said summat to her about it. But we mun hope for t'best, that all. An' standin' here talkin'. Sit yer down, Mr. Oakroyd, an' I' mak' yer a bit o' tea. Your Leonard'll be here in a minute—it's h time—an' I allus mak' him a bit. I've been bakin' today. I'll fetch curran' cake an' a piece o' fatty cake in, if you'll just watch t'kettle minute."

Ten minutes later, she had come and gone again, and Mr. Oakroy was sitting at the table with his son, Leonard, a very subdued Leonar indeed. The dandy huntsman who had marked and captured brig feminine prey in so many social-and-dance halls, cinemas and chea cafés, had vanished, and in his place was a troubled, frightened lad wit a trembling lower lip, a lad who had caught a glimpse of another an adful huntsman. He could add very little to the information already plied by Mrs. Sugden.

Mr. Oakroyd found relief in a sudden spurt of anger. “Yer gurt fat-ad,” he cried, “why didn’t you let me know afore ’at your mother s so poorly? Haven’t sense you were born wi’!”

“I couldn’t,” Leonard mumbled miserably.

“Ar d’you mean you couldn’t? Couse you could!”

“I couldn’t. I told you, I didn’t know at first, and then when Mar s taken so bad, she said ‘Don’t tell yer father.’ It’s last thing she l say to me.”

Mr. Oakroyd’s anger fell away from him. He stared down at the le. “What did she want to say that for?” he asked quietly, at last.

“Nay, I don’t know,” his son muttered. “Except she didn’t want ı to know.”

Mr. Oakroyd pushed away his cup, and made a little sad clicking se. “When I come at Christmas, I knew she were poorly then, an’ owd her so. An’ I towd our Lily she wor in a letter I wrote. Eh, ır!” For a moment he surveyed in silence the whole melancholy con-ion of this life. “Well, I’ll go to t’Infirmary i’ t’morning. Happen y’ll let me see her. What did they say when you asked today?”

Said she was just about the same. She’s bad, father; she is bad.” got up from the table and turned away.

Mr. Oakroyd automatically filled his pipe with *Old Salt,* but did not ıt it. He remained where he was at the table, flattening his cheek ıinst his fist, and sank into a troubled reverie. Leonard went up-ırs, came down again, smoked a cigarette over the fire.

Me Aunt Alice came last night,” Leonard remarked, breaking the g silence.

Ay, she did, did she?” Mr. Oakroyd left the table now and lit his e. “An’ ar’s she gettin’ on then?” His wife’s sister, this Alice, s married to a railwayman, and lived at the other side of Brudders-d. Mr. Oakroyd had not seen her for years. As a matter of fact, disliked both her and her husband.

All right,” said Leonard indifferently. “Me cousin Mabel’s gettin’ rried soon.”

Well, well! Last time I saw Mabel she were nobbut a bit of a kid wi' a mucky pinafore, as you might say. And nar she's gettin' we Who's t'chap?"

"Johnson, they call him. He works in the railway office—pen-push You might think he owned it, to hear him talk. Lot o' swank! A Mabel's no kid now. She's over a year older than me, nearly as o as our Lily."

"You haven't said owt to our Lily yet, have you?" asked Mr. Oakro anxiously.

Leonard shook his head. "I haven't written her a letter for t months. She doesn't write to me. You'll be writing, won't you?"

What was he going to write? The thought chilled him, but warm returned with the thought of Lily herself. If only she were here w him! But no, she was better out of it. He stared about him, th suddenly remembered something. "Here," he cried, "where's Albe I'd forgotten him."

"Gone. Went a fortnight since."

"Well, that's summat, anyhow. A bit o' yon Albert's talk nar ' just about put finishing touch on it. An' what's happened to h then?"

"Gettin' married this week." And Leonard grinned sardonical "Got caught all right, Mr. Tuggridge did. Told him he would, l he wouldn't leave her alone. They didn't give him any option, neith when they knew. Her father come to see him. Poor old Alber Yes, his days as a wandering gallant were over. No more ogling a pursuing and picking up for him. He had picked up once too oft He had "got caught" and would soon be seen with a perambulator

"Poor owd nothing!" cried Mr. Oakroyd scornfully. "I'm sorry t'lass as weds him. Gurt clever head—gas-bag! An' that's no w for you to talk, neither, lad," he added severely. "'Got caught'! maks me fair shamed to hear a lad o' mine talking that way. If said owt o' that sort in front o' my father, he'd ha' ta'en a stick my back, he would that. D'yer think t'lasses is nobbut for you to follerin' round an' laking wi'? What d'yer think they are—bits toys?" He regarded his son sternly for a moment. "Ar yer do at yer work? Still wi' Gregson's?"

Yes," Leonard replied, rather sulkily. "Doing all right. Got the ond chair now and a lot of reg'lar customers. I'm making nearly r pounds a week."

That's the style. Well, happen you'll be better off when you 'get ght' as you call it. Might knock a bit o' sense into you if a decent gets howd on you. You nivver knaw."

Chap offered me a job in Manchester the other day," Leonard mum- l, "and I'd like to have taken it. More money and a change. I'm ing sick of Bruddersford. If—if owt happens to me mother I shall ' He swallowed hard.

Ir. Oakroyd relaxed the severity of his expression. "Ay, lad, you n do whativver you think best. I've no call to be tellin' you what lo. An' whativver else you've done, you've noan been a bad lad to r mother."

Iaving said this, he cleared his throat, and looked sternly at the ning paper, as if he knew very well he could not believe a word it . Leonard, muttering something about "a walk round," disappeared. Oakroyd read the paper through carefully, unhopefully, smoked pe or two and stared solemnly at the fire, then went to bed.

II

Bruddersford Infirmary could not be mistaken for one of the local ories because it has no tall chimney. Otherwise there is little dif- nce. It is a rambling ugly building, all in blackened stone and sur- nded first by an asphalt courtyard, where the smuts drizzle cease- y, and then by tall iron railings that would not seem out of place nd a prison. Through these railings a nurse may be seen oc- onally, and as she flits across those grim spaces of stone and soot she s like a being from another world, incredibly immaculate. Here, of the sunlight, far from green shades and blue distances, where birds sing, but where the lorries and steam-waggons come thundering n and the trams go groaning up the hill, here behind this rusting and walls thickened with black grime, the Bruddersfordians have out or two, a tussle, or a fight to a finish, with Death.

he last time Mr. Oakroyd had visited the Infirmary was to see a nd of his from Higden's, a good many years ago. He could hardly remember what it looked like inside. He was familiar enough w the outside, for the place was not quarter of a mile from Ogden St and for years he had walked past it nearly every day. This morni however, even the outside seemed strange. His wife was somewh inside it, behind one of those dark windows.

"Is it special," asked the porter, "'cos this isn't visiting time, knaw."

"Well, I don't know fairly," said Mr. Oakroyd. "I wer sent like, an' I've come a long way."

"If yer'll howd on a minute, I'll see. What's t'name again? right. Yer can wait in there." And the porter, after pointing t door, turned away.

There were several people in the bare little waiting-room. One them was an enormously fat woman, wrapped in a shawl. The te were streaming down her face, and she made no attempt to dry eyes, but repeated over and over again, without any variation of to "They nivver owt to ha' let him come in, nivver."

On the other side was an oldish man, whose drooping face Mr. O royd dimly recognised. "Fower operations in eighteen months, th what she's had," he was saying. "Fower operations." There was mou ful pride in his voice. He looked round, nodded vaguely to Mr. O royd, and then began again: "Ay, fower operations."

The others there, including two children, said nothing at all. Th just waited, and Mr. Oakroyd had an obscure conviction that they h been waiting a long time. His heart sank. He wanted to go aw

The porter was standing at the door, beckoning to him. "Oakro isn't it? That's Num-ber Twen-ty-sev-en, List-er Ward. Well, t'sis says she's very sorry but yer can't see 'er now but will you come ag this afternoon."

"I see," said Mr. Oakroyd, and immediately found himself invad by a feeling of relief. He tried to be disappointed, told himself must see her as soon as he could, but nevertheless he could not he feeling relieved. He had been in there only a few minutes, had n really been inside, but even so it was comforting to be back again the bustle of Woolgate. Something dogged him, however, througho his stroll through the main streets. He was like a chap out on bail.

He called again in the early afternoon, only to be told to return ter. Then at last he was admitted. He climbed up four flights of one steps and then found Lister Ward. A nurse met him at the en- ance. "Let me see," she said, "you're for Number Seventeen—little oris Smith—aren't you?"

When Mr. Oakroyd told her he was wanting Number Twenty-seven, e seemed disappointed, and this made him all the more uncomfortable, if he had no right to be there.

'Yes, I remember now," she said, looking all round him but not at m. "Sister said you could see her, didn't she? You're the husband, en't you? She hasn't been asking for you. There's a son, isn't there? thought I'd seen him. This way then, and don't make too much ise. This isn't the proper visiting day, and you mustn't disturb the hers."

He crept after her in a fashion that would not have disturbed a fly. e tiptoed so gently that his legs ached. They had to go almost the hole length of the ward, and though he tried to see as little of it as ssible, he could not help noticing some things. All the women were bed and they all seemed to have something blue on; some were old, ne very young; some asleep, some staring fiercely; and there were ange things, pulley arrangements, on some of the beds; and one or o were completely surrounded by screens. No moaning and groaning; t a sound; it was all as quiet as a waxwork show; all tidy and polished d still; very queer, frightening.

The nurse suddenly stopped. She turned round, looking right at m this time. "Your wife's very ill, you know," she whispered. "You ust be very quiet with her. Don't mind if she's not very clear, wander- g a little. Just a minute." She walked forward to a bed, and he ard her say: "Now Twenty-seven, your husband's come to see you." hat else she said he did not know, but he saw her leaning over the l, doing something, and then she stepped back and nodded to him. e tiptoed forward, feeling horribly clumsy, uncertain. One hand, d behind him, was tightening, tightening, until its nails were digging o the horny palm. Then he stood by the bedside, looking down into face of Number Twenty-seven.

Eh, lass," he said huskily. He tried to smile, but could only make a grimace. "Nay—nay." And there seemed nothing more he co say.

Her face was all bone and sharp wrinkles and seemed as brittl egg-shell. Her mouth was a short line, dark, bitter. But her e though they wandered with an awful slowness, still gleamed in t hollows, and there looked out from those eyes the soul, stubborn, flinching, ironic, of Mrs. Oakroyd. He himself could feel this, tho he had no words for it. But an inner voice was saying "Eh, s nivver give in," and he stared at her in mingled pity and awe.

Her eyes roamed over him. She stirred a little and there cam sickly sweet smell. A hand travelled slowly over the folded sheet, as he sat down he grasped it. His face was working desperately to no purpose.

"Jess? What—what—you doing here?"

"Our Leonard sent."

At the mention of Leonard those eyes changed, softened. They wo not do that for anything else now, it seemed.

"I didn't tell him to." Her voice was clear but slow, a voice speak out of a dream.

"He thowt he'd better send word. He's been a good lad. I told h he's been a good lad to his mother."

"Time you thowt so," she said, with a flash of the old sharp spi "Ay, ay, a good lad . . . our Leonard. Is he coming soon?"

"Soon as he can or whenivver you want him," he told her.

She nodded, very slowly, so that it hurt him to watch her doing Then she looked away, at nothing it seemed, as if he was no lon there. He waited through a shrinking and numbing silence. At la however, she looked at him again, and it was as if she had return from far away and was faintly surprised to find him still there. tried to think of something to say, but there seemed to be nothing could say and somehow his voice too had rusted away.

"I'm bad, Jess," she said finally.

His voice came back. "Eh, lass, why didn't you tell me afore?"

She did not seem to hear this. "I wish they'd let me alone," s muttered. "They can do nowt."

"Nay, they will," he said, and tried to convince himself that they uld do something, though in his heart he knew they could not.

"Can't—can't I do owt?" he asked desperately.

To this she made no reply beyond looking at him searchingly, with faint gleam of irony in her eyes. When it faded and she stirred again, seemed as if he had been dismissed. Her hand crept out of his and oved uneasily over the sheet. When she spoke again, she began wanering. There was something about their Lily, about Higden's, about peggy-tub she had borrowed; all a dreamy jumble. The nurse came o quietly and touched him on the shoulder. He stood up, looked on hile she gave his wife something to drink.

"You'd better go now," she told him. But she withdrew for a moent.

His wife looked at him, steadily now. "Going, Jess, now, aren't yer? er managed all right for yersen when yer went away, didn't yer?"

"I nivver owt to ha' gone."

"Nay, lad, I don't know. You've done nowt to be sorry for. Couldn't e helped. Are yer going on all right?"

He nodded.

"Better so, then," she went on. "And our Leonard's doing right well. h, he is—right well!" She closed her eyes for a moment, then looked him again, with the wizened ghost of a smile. "Yer mun go and e our Lily some time if yer can get. That's what you've allus wanted, n't it? Nay, Jess, I know. Tell our Leonard to come tonight."

This time, when he found himself outside in Woolgate again, he also und that he had not really left the Infirmary behind. It was the streets d shops, the trams and lorries, the whole noisy bustling business, at seemed grotesque, unreal, now. Half of him still went tip-toeing in at long room of beds and blue-covered shoulders, of pulley things d screens. The quiet of it remained with him and conjured away l the solid reality from the traffic of the streets. What was all the mmotion about? Mr. Oakroyd did not say all these things to himlf; he could not have found words for most of them; but nevertheless e felt them. You could have read them in his wondering glances as u passed him in the street.

When he went the next day, she was obviously weaker. Her eyes had a drugged look; she mumbled in her talk; and nearly everything said was disconnected, wandering, the odd wreckage of dreams scattered memories. He sat there for an hour, staring sadly, squeez his fingers, and then crept away, hurt, and frightened.

In the evening, he went again, with Leonard, and they were t they could go up to the ward. They were not admitted, howev the sister said it had been a mistake: Number Twenty-seven cou not be seen just then. Perhaps it might be as well if they stayed so time in the waiting-room below. And they caught a glimpse throu the door of screens round the bed. They waited an hour, two hou turning over evening papers that seemed to say nothing, starting every time the door was opened. It was late. They enquired aga and were told it was useless waiting any longer. There was no chan they must hope for the best; everything that could be done was bei done. But next morning, before the earliest buzzers had sound Number Twenty-seven was dead.

After he had visited the cold little chapel, where the body would main until the undertaker wanted it, they put into his hand a par wrapped in brown paper, and mechanically he accepted it and took home, and mechanically he opened it there. Some clothes; a bru and comb; a little envelope, out of which rolled a wedding ring. The was something else in the envelope. False teeth.

"Eh, well I don't know!" cried Mrs. Sugden, who was for ever the house now. "What they want to bother yer with them things fo Poor soul! They've ner more sense than—nay, I don't know!"

But Mr. Oakroyd only nodded and then stumped away.

III

He did what had to be done without protest. He helped Leonard t put something in the paper. He saw the undertaker and the insuranc man. He sent a cable to Lily, and this alone of all his duties brough about a thaw inside his numbed self. When the man explained how it could be sent and when it would probably get there, he felt a sudden warmth and wanted to cry. For the rest, he did what he had to do but was so quiet that his wife's relations, who came pouring in with her sister, Alice Bairstow, at their head, did not know what to make him. Noisy and red-eyed but secretly rejoicing in their own im- rtality, they discussed him in corners. It was Mrs. Sugden's opinion t he was "taking it 'ard," but though her position as sympathetic ghbour and tea-brewer to the bereaved was recognised, it was held t her opinion on this matter was uncalled-for and therefore of no sequence. Mrs. Bairstow was heard to say that what really troubled brother-in-law was remorse, as well it might. He had gone off d knows where and left her to it, and this is what had come of it. t she did not go so far as to say this to him. All she did was to l with him in a spirit of large but strained tolerance, and make a at fuss of Leonard. Once or twice Mr. Oakroyd glowered at her d was obviously on the point of saying something sharp, but most of time he simply humped about, looking grey and wooden, and nodded eement to everything she said. What she did say chiefly concerned funeral, which was to be in the best traditions of Ogden Street. sent out a host of invitations, and pledged the forthcoming insurance ney royally.

t was on the morning of the funeral that Mr. Oakroyd received a er. For a moment, he thought it must be from Lily, and his heart ped up, but as soon as he saw it was not, he lost interest at once and ffed it into his pocket without reading it. There would be plenty time for that afterwards, when all the black fuss and bustle was r. This being a funeral in the grand tradition, it was a very lengthy air. The assembly of the carriages and the mourners took some time. en there was the long slow drive out to Dum Wood Cemetery, where ious Bruddersfordians go walking on fine Sunday afternoons, many ear before they are taken there to await the last trump. Then fol- ved a service in the cemetery chapel, where the Rev. J. Hamilton rris, B.A., of Woolgate Congregational Chapel, tried to dwell upon virtues of the deceased and found it very difficult because he knew y little about her. He did what he could, however, looked manfully the tear-stained or grim faces, and finally asked the grave where its tory was. And when all was done, there was the long drive back, to 51, Ogden Street, but to Caddy's in Shuttle Street, where a eral tea had been ordered. Caddy's, being old-fashioned, still made peciality of these repasts, and on their business cards might be seen, sandwiched between *Catering* and *Wedding Cakes* the announcem *Funeral Teas.* Mourners, mostly relations, still come considerable tances, and not only must they be refreshed but they must also be p vided with an opportunity to exchange news, for many scattered fami only meet at a funeral. It is not perhaps true to say that these teas the most jovial functions known to elderly Bruddersfordians, but it m be admitted that they are generally a success, going with a swing t many social events in Bruddersford never know. Everybody has t pleasant feeling of having carried through a painful duty; after a si of the open grave, it is good to return to life, to eat and drink a swop news with uncles and cousins; and, moreover, what with lo rides, services, and standing about in cemeteries, to say nothing of havoc wrought by the emotions, a mourner develops a real appetite, a funeral teas are good solid meat teas. That is the reason why comedian who plays the Dame in the Bruddersford pantomime ne fails—has not failed these last thirty years—to bring down the ho with the remark: "I buried 'im with 'am." On this occasion, M Bairstow had ordered Caddy's to provide a sound specimen of th knife-and-fork tea, and they had disappointed neither her nor any her hopeful guests.

Among those who did full justice to both the ham and the tong was Mr. Oakroyd's old friend and our old acquaintance, that in pendent craftsman and keeper of hens, Mr. Sam Oglethorpe. Here w one person Mr. Oakroyd could talk to, and though actually he did n do much talking, he kept close to Sam from the moment they all tramp up Caddy's stairs.

"Well, Jess," said Mr. Oglethorpe, "I'll ha' to be off. I've getten t'he to see to, tha knaws. Farls can't wait if fowk can."

"Ay," said Mr. Oakroyd disconsolately. Then he brightened u "Here, Sam, I'm coming wi' yer."

"Won't they want yer?" said Mr. Oglethorpe. They had wandere away from the tables now.

"If they do, they mun want on. Ther's nowt I can do here nar."

"Right, owd lad," said Mr. Oglethorpe cheerfully. "We'll get t'tram.

They said little or nothing, either on the tram or on the walk t Wabley from the terminus, but they smoked companionably all the way l Mr. Oakroyd did at least lose the feeling that he was wandering an ugly dream. Sam might not be one of the brightest or have much say for himself, but he was a comfortable sort of chap to be with at ime like this.

I'll tell yer what," Mr. Oglethorpe suggested, when he had finished nding to his fowls, "we'll ha' a sup o' beer. Tha doesn't want to go to *T'Anglers?* I thowt not. Well, I'll fetch a sup and we'll car quiet it i' t'hen-hoil. Nay, don't you come; I'll fetch it mysen."

This was that same combined hen-house and workshop where he l sat and talked to Sam and his nephew Ted, of the lorry, on a Sun- night that now seemed years and years away. It was while he was iting in there that he remembered the letter in his pocket. It was m Miss Trant:

ar Mr. Oakroyd:

was so sorry to learn that your wife was ill and that you had to go home. o hope that by this time you have better news of her. I have some news you. Mr. Gooch has seen this man Ridvers, and he has frightened him agreeing to pay the claim for damages. I don't know whether this is ery legal thing to do—it doesn't seem like it—but it is only right he should for his stupidity. It will cost him a good deal too, which means that I e been saved a good deal—thanks to you. Please remember this when hear from Mr. Gooch, as you will very shortly. The other news is that . MacFarlane and I are to be married very soon. We shall live just out- e Gatford for a time. I'm afraid this means that a plan I had for offering some work at Hitherton won't be possible now, though it was only gue. But will you please come and talk over your plans—unless you have eady fixed something up for yourself? I have just had a very excited er from Susie in London. She has begun rehearsing already and likes part.

Yours sincerely,

Elizabeth Trant.

read this letter through twice, very carefully. He was glad that iss Trant would not have to pay. He was also glad that she was rrying the big doctor chap. He told himself he was glad, yet he was nscious of feeling only a vague disappointment. The letter—a fine ter too—ought to have cheered him up, but it did not cheer him up.

He was still numb, frozen, with just the tiniest bit of an ache s where.

There was a cosy gossiping look about Sam when he returned his jugful. Mr. Oakroyd wanted to feel like that too, but some he couldn't manage it.

"Well, Jess," said Mr. Oglethorpe, in his usual slow, meditative, bing Work style, "an' ar yer've been finding things down South?"

"Nay," said Mr. Oakroyd, "we've had bit o' bother just lately, bit mix-up, you might say." A week ago, he would have plunged at into an account of the whole affair, but now he couldn't, not wit an effort. It all seemed such a long way off, like a tale in a book.

"Ay, I dare say," said Mr. Oglethorpe, nodding and frowning j cially. Obviously it would not surprise what happened down So "Been i' the-ater line, haven't yer, Jess? I did hear. An' what is to do i' that line o' business? Be a change from Higden's, eh? Diff' altogether, I'll be barnd?"

Mr. Oakroyd admitted that it was, and described briefly what he been doing for the past six months. If he had been describing fairyla his hearer could not have been more astonished and delighted, but tho he felt a faint warmth at this reception of his news, a reception anticipated, often imagined, he could not really be kindled. And was just the same when they came to talk of his travels.

"An' Bristol an' Bedfordsheer, Jess," cried Mr. Oglethorpe, "did ivver get theer?"

"Bristol an' Bedfordshire?" he repeated, puzzled.

"Nay, lad, don't yer remember? I mind it as well as if it wor nob yesterda'. Yer come here, it wor t'last time yer ivver wor here, yer wanted to be off somewheer—down South—an' I says 'Well, wh d'yer want to go', an' yer says, 'Bristol an' Bedfordsheer', an' I laug An' then—by gow!—afore I can turn rahnd—yer've gone. Eh, I' had monny a good laugh ower it. I've been dahn to Bruddersfo we'll say, an' one o' t'chaps o' t'club has assed 'Wheer's Jess Oakro Sam?' an' I've towd them. 'Bristol an' Bedfordsheer,' I says. d'yer mean?' they says. 'Well, he come here,' I says, 'an' he says me he'd like to go to Bristol an' Bedfordsheer, an' t'next minute he off,' I says. Don't tell me yer nivver went, Jess."

"I remember," said Mr. Oakroyd slowly. "Well, I nivver got to istol, Sam, though I've nivver given it a thowt. I may ha' seen dfordshire, but I don't knaw fairly. We've been all ower t'shop, up ' down an' across, on t'road, yer knaw. Ay, I've seen a deal."

"Then yer owt to be satisfied nar, lad," observed Mr. Oglethorpe, with uggestion of irony. "Tell us wheer yer've been an' what yer've seen."

Mr. Oakroyd rubbed his chin. "That's a big order, Sam," he began, ubtfully. "When yer've been about a bit, places ——"

Mr. Oglethorpe stopped him at once. He looked very reproachful, ough waggish. "Nar, Jess," he cautioned, "yer not goin' to tell me places is all alike when yer come to know 'em."

'Well, summat o' t'sort," Mr. Oakroyd muttered.

His friend instantly banged the table. "Them's t'words, very words, our Ted used i' this very place that Sunda'," he roared. "Very rds he said. An' yer said 'Nay, I'll be damned if I'll ha' that.' And acked yer up. Our Ted wor only talking abart it t'other week here, en he wor wondering where yer'd got to. Well, well, well! That os t'lot. We live an' we learn, we live an' we learn. Nay, Jess!"

Howd thi noise, Sam!" Mr. Oakroyd protested good-humouredly. t he looked, and felt, confused. "I don't mean all places is alike. ur Ted wor wrong. He went too far, too far bi half, he did. What hink is this ——"

Nay, Jess, leave it, lad, leave it nar. Say ner more. Here, have other sup o' beer. Bit better ner like, this beer. If they don't look , they'll be puttin' some malt an' hops in it agen, same as they used instead o' just colourin' t'reservoy watter an' fillin' t'barrels wi' that. ell, what's t'next job then, lad? Still in t'the-ater line?"

Mr. Oakroyd did not know, and he hardly seemed to care. He had ed himself this question several times but somehow had found it te easy to leave it unanswered. It was as if something inside him just snapped. "I don't knaw," he replied, blowing out his breath what was recognised to be the Bruddersfordian equivalent of a sigh. don't, Sam. There was a bit o' talk about me gettin' summat else i' me line, but I don't knaw what'll come of it. I haven't thowt about I suppose I mun be looking round."

Mr. Oglethorpe nodded sagely. Then he looked very grave. "Keep aht o' t'Joinery an' Jobbing i' this neighbourhood, Jess, that's all. V things is nar, it's nowt—nowt at all, it isn't. It's just like t'hens sc tin' for a bit o' summat."

"Is it war ner it wor?" enquired Mr. Oakroyd.

"Nay, trade's so bad and ther's so monny either stopped or on sl time, they'll ha' nowt done, d'yer see, Jess? They'd let t'places go rack an' ruin afore they'd have owt done. Sitha, I can't put me n in onnywheer withart seeing hawf-a-dozen little jobs 'at wants do But fowk hasn't bit o' brass to spare. They can't thoil it, lad. nearly made as mich aht o' t'hens. I've been keepin' farls nar for fo teen year, an' I shan't be capped if at finish t'farls is keepin' me. don't set up for thysen on t'Joinery an' Jobbing i' these parts, J Might be diff'rent dahn South, I dare say, but here—it's nowt. Kee t'the-ater line, I say, 'cos fowk seems to ha' brass to spend on the-a an' t'animated picters an' suchlike these days when they haven't a pence for owt beside. Has ta' 'ad onny young actresses i' tow, Jess?

"Nay, Sam, who d'yer think I am?" But Mr. Oakroyd was shocked. He had replied almost mechanically.

It occurred to Mr. Oglethorpe then that this was hardly the time such badinage—the clay of Dum Wood Cemetery being hardly dry their boots yet—and hastily and awkwardly he changed the subj But he could not change his friend's heavy and abstracted mood, soon their talk dwindled to nothing. Mr. Oakroyd returned home companied by a dark confusion of thoughts and memories, in wh his adventures on the road, all the ups and downs of *The Good Co panions,* had their place. Yet they were only like shadows flicker on a wall. He wanted to see them all again, these *Good Compani* he could dwell affectionately on his thought of them; but neverthe they were little figures, far away, and he realised, in his own du obscure fashion, that it was not they who had the power to wake back to life. Nor was it anybody or anything in Bruddersford. walked slowly through the familiar streets, a shrunken figure in ill-fitting suit of black, solitary beneath the street lamps that only tensified the great dark above, a man alone. No, not entirely alone, keeping step with him were immense vague shapes, so many configu tions of mystery, pain and death.

IV

en we mun sell t'home up," said Mr. Oakroyd, early the next morn- . He was looking disconsolately across the table at Leonard, who just announced that he had decided to take the job he had been red in Manchester.

No good keepin' it if you're not going to stop in Bruddersford," said nard.

Well, I'm not," his father remarked quietly.

What are you going to do?"

Wait a bit, lad, wait a bit. I'll see." Mr. Oakroyd was rather irrita- now. "We can't all be barbers wi' jobs i' Manchester round t'corner, we?"

was only askin'," said Leonard, a sulky boy again.

That's all right, lad. Tak' no notice. I'm glad you can look after en. Yer doin' right well, Leonard, an' if you'd nobbut settle a an' not go malackin' abart so much wi' t'girls——"

've 'ad enough of that," said Leonard, who believed at the moment he had.

That's all right, then. You'll do champion," said Mr. Oakroyd, rding his son for once with something like approval. "Well, we'll to sell up. Ar's it's got to be done, that's t'point? We're havin' auctionin'."

Wouldn't be worth it anyway," said Leonard, with a glance round room. "Not enough stuff here."

y gow!—we live an' learn. I thowt once upon a time I'd getten ood home together," cried Mr. Oakroyd, with some bitterness, "but ningly it's not worth sellin' up nar."

est thing we can do," said Leonard, wisely disregarding this out- t, "is to get one or two of these second-hand furniture chaps in, they'll offer a price. Albert'll tell me who's the best. I'll go and him this morning if you like."

ll right." Mr. Oakroyd looked about him now. "I wonder if 's owt our Lily 'ud like for hersen," he mused.

are say there might." Leonard lit a cigarette. "But she'll have a better place of her own now. Jack Clough gets good money there."

"I'll look abart a bit. Then if ther's owt I think she could do I'll pack it up in a box." He suddenly remembered something. " whativver I do, I'll ha' to go back to Gatford. I left my tools."

Leonard stared at him. "Gor, you made me jump, Par! Is that Tools!"

"Ay, tools, lad, tools! It's enough an' all. I'm a tradesman, I an' I can't set mysen up wi' a pair o' scissors an' a pair o' clippers a drop o' hair-oil. I want summat to work wi' when I start. A been using some o' them tools for twenty year, an' don't you fo it. I wouldn't be wi'out 'em for owt. I'm a tradesman, see—an you ask me, ther's noan so damn monny on us left."

"Can you wonder," said Leonard, with all the scorn of a younger wiser generation, "wages they pay?"

"Happen not," said his father gloomily. "For all that, a chap learnt his trade an' can use his hands—he isn't a machine an' he i a flippin' monkey—he's a man, lad, wages or no wages, a *man*." he gave the table a bang. It was immediately answered by anot at the door. "Hello, who's this?"

"Postman. I'll go." And when Leonard came back, he added: " for me and one for you."

Mr. Oakroyd had been told by Miss Trant that he would hear fr Mr. Gooch of Gatford, but nevertheless he was astonished. He even more astonished when the following little bombshell had expl under his nose:

Dear Sir:

Following the instructions of our client, Miss E. Trant, upon the s factory termination of our negotiations with Mr. Ridvers, we have pleas in handing you herewith our cheque, on behalf of Miss Trant, for £ (one hundred pounds) receipt of which kindly acknowledge to us as as to Miss Trant herself.

Yours faithfully,

Goring, Son and Gooc

And there it was, with the letter, a little bit of blue and white pa *Pay Mr. J. Oakroyd or Order.* A hundred pounds. Nay!

Here," he shouted to Leonard, "I've getten a hundred pound. Eh, aht o' all reason. A hundred pound! That's right, isn't it?"

Well I'll be blowed! What you got that for, Par? Let's have a k at it. That's right. It's a cheque, that is. But what you got it ?"

Well, I did a bit o' puttin' two an' two together for this Miss Trant een workin' for. Must ha' saved a good deal, I dare say, but this is o' all reason. Nay—a hundred pound!"

Depends what you did, doesn't it?" said Leonard, looking very wing.

r. Oakroyd explained briefly what he had done.

Well, that's it then," said Leonard. "You might have saved her a t lot—'spect you did,—wish I had it." He inspected the cheque in. "I know a bit about these things. You can't cash this, y'know, , 'cos it's got Company written on. You'll have to pay it into nk."

What bank? Haven't got a bank, though I once had a bit in t'Post ce. An' I'd some trade on gettin' owt aht on 'em an' all."

You goes to bank with this, and you pays it in," Leonard explained, d of his knowledge of high finance, "and then if you want it—ey, y'know—you take it out again. That's way you do it."

ut it in an' tak' it aht," cried Mr. Oakroyd, puzzled. "I call that . Still, if that's t'way, I'll do it. An' I mun do some o' this kindly owledgin' too. Eh, but—a hundred pound!" And he stared at son in bewilderment.

Come in handy, that little lot," said Leonard, who was now slipping the part of the knowing young man. "That and what you'll get n selling up here, it'll give you a good old start all right."

Nay, I can't keep all I get from selling t'home up," Mr. Oakroyd ested. "You mun have half, Leonard. We might get summat for Lily an' all. Onny road, we'll divide an' make a divvy on it."

ur Lily won't want anything. She's well off, she is. And I don't," ed Leonard, who, to give him his due, was not a grasping youth. ep it yourself, Par. What there is, is yours all right. But we 't get much, I can tell you now. I'll go and ask Albert."

As soon as he was left alone, Mr. Oakroyd began rummaging a
to see if there was anything that Lily might like. He wandered
stairs, spending quite a time there, looking not at little old posses
but at the very past itself, so that times, seasons, occasions, event
had almost entirely forgotten returned all clear and bright but
small, part of a melancholy enchantment.

A slight noise from downstairs called him into the immediate pr
again. He descended quietly, to discover in the living-room, jus
the old sofa, what looked like a hillock of dirty blue serge. The
moment it turned itself into Mrs. Sugden rising from her knees, pan
purple-faced, and a trifle confused.

"Mornin', Mrs. Sugden," he said, rather drily, "I couldn't think
it wor."

"Eh, Mr. Oakroyd, I 'ope yer don't mind," she cried, puffing
blowing. "I looked in to see if there was owt I could do for yer
your Leonard towed me as he was passin' yer were sellin' up a
were just 'aving a look at t'sofa. I've been wantin' one for some
an' I thowt I might as well 'ave it if it's goin' just as well as t'n

"Ay," he said, wagging his head at her in a kind of half-mour
half-humourous resignation. "So you might, Mrs. Sugden. Ta
look while you've a chance. Here today and gone tomorn, that's
motto." And he left her to it, but now, when he looked round
stairs, there was only so much furniture and odds and ends all w
for wear, just old junk. He had to comfort himself with a pip
Old Salt.

And then it happened.

"Mr. Oakroyd, Mr. Oakroyd," she was screaming up the s
"there's summat come for yer." And when he hurried down, she ac
holding something out to him: "Looks like a sort o' telegram."

It was a cable. Trembling, Mr. Oakroyd put his pipe down or
table, and even then only opened the envelope with difficulty.
stared, breathing hard. *Very grieved all love if you come out
very welcome and good job any time Lily Jack.* Again and agai
read it, making sure. And then it was as if a huge door had
opened and the sunlight was flooding in, warming him to life agai

n' will yer go?" asked Mrs. Sugden, when at last he had satisfied curiosity. "Eh, it's a long way off."

ong way! Long nowt! If it were from here to t'moon I'd go."

nd Mrs. Sugden, hearing the terrible voice of love triumphant, was ced. No doubt she knew that when this voice peals out, all other s in the universe are nothing but reedy whispers, better silent. aps she acquired the sofa as a reward for recognising these authentic s.

nother person heard them that morning. This was the young man orry's Shipping Agency in Shuttle Street. He looked up from his to see a detestable, cheap, black suit, a mouth that was in earnest, wo blue eyes that blazed with excitement.

ar, lad," said this caller, in the usual and regrettable Bruddersford er, "just tell me how I can get to Canada."

e young man put away his book and took out a pencil. This ded like business. "Assisted passage, I suppose?"

r d'you mean?"

e young man began to explain about emigration and government s and forms to fill in, but he was quickly cut short.

owt o' that," said Mr. Oakroyd. "Ther's no government i' this. ayin' for mysen. I can manage third class nicely."

en that's different," said the young man, who now began to talk the various routes and steamship lines. "Of course it depends here you want to go to at the other end. But we might begin this end first. You could go from either Liverpool or Southamp-

ampion!" cried Mr. Oakroyd.

s, either Liverpool or Southampton."

od enough!" Then, after some thought, he went on: "Nar I fancy ampton, an' I'll tell yer for why. I'd like to call at a place i' ands—Gatford—an' then I'd like to go to London on t'way, 'cos some friends o' mine there 'at I'd like to see afore I go. So we'll it Southampton, lad."

od! Southampton." And the young man flourished his pencil. t part of Canada are you going to? We could probably arrange k you right through."

"Yer a smart young feller, I can see," said Mr. Oakroyd in g delight. "Just get your map aht an' I'll show yer where I want to It's where my dowter lives an' I can put me finger on t'very place. knaw abaht Canada, do yer? Ay, well, you an' me'ull mak' a right job on it."

For the next hour that young man of Torry's never returned to book. On the other hand, he did not miss it. Life had walked the shop.

V

It is Saturday afternoon again, and once more something queer is pening in that narrow thoroughfare to the west of the town, Manch Road. A grey-green tide flows sluggishly down the road, a tide of caps, leaving the ground of "t'United," where Huddersfield have been defeated by three goals to two. Somewhere in the middle of thick stream of cloth caps is one that looks newer than most o neighbours. It belongs to Mr. Jesiah Oakroyd, who has contrive attend this match before leaving Bruddersford for years, perhaps for He is catching a train to Gatford, his first little halt on his long jou this very evening, and already his suit-case and his big tin trunk at the station, waiting for the 6.50. Casual talk is easy in such a sl moving throng and is favoured because it helps to pass the time when it does not also relieve the feelings. Mr. Oakroyd is engaged We can just overhear a sentence or two.

"Ay," his neighbour observes, "if they'd nobbut laked like thi t'season they'd ha' been somewhere at the top instead of being near bottom. They're just wak'ning up nar it's nearly ower."

"Well, it's been a grand match today, it has," says Mr. Oak dreamily. "I nivver want to see a better. Eh, it were t'owd forn ower agen. Them last two goals—nay, by gow!"

"Ay, them wor a bit of all right."

"All right! They wor *grand!*"

And then we hear no more. The tide of caps and men flows slowly but gradually gathering speed, like our years. It recedes, shr until at last you do not notice it at all. Manchester Road is now one of a hundred thoroughfares, for Bruddersford itself, the whole sp t, has come into view. Holdsworth's giant mill looms there on the ; the Midland Railway's station glitters in the sun again, and there n answering gleam from the glass roof of the Market Hall; a silver ak shows one of the canals; and in the centre of the tall chimneys, king the air with its *Lass of Richmond Hill,* is the tower of the ddersford Town Hall. It points a finger at us, and then is gone, lost faint smudge of smoke. Another moment and Bruddersford is only imy crack in the hills. The high moorland between Yorkshire and cashire rises steadily, clear in the pearly light of Spring. Once more, miles and miles of ling and bog and black rock, and the curlews ng above the scattered jewellery of the little tarns. There are the byshire hills, and there, away to the north, are the great fells of nberland, and now the whole darkening length of it, from the Peak Cross Fell, is visible, for this is the Pennine Range, sometimes called backbone of England.

Epilogue

ING A MERE POSTSCRIPT ADDRESSED TO THOSE WHO INSIST UPON HAVING ALL THE LATEST NEWS

NO, Susie has not married Inigo. On the other hand, she has not married anybody else. There have been times when rumours and le paragraphs in the gossip columns have sent Inigo flying round to her (not that he is not always seeing her), but she has laughed and d him not to be silly. Once, it is true, there was real danger—for, after , nobody can deny that Sir Douglas Heath-Watchett is an extremely ractive young man—and that was the time when poor Inigo, con- iced that all was lost, fled to Norway and tried to fish. He returned, wever, to find Susie still laughing and Sir Douglas booking a passage Florida, where there are fish even larger than those in Norway. Susie 's she is too young to marry yet and that life is too amusing. When she ds herself on the point of being relegated to minor parts, or, alterna- ely, when there is no more fun in being a star comedienne with a huge d rapturous public of her own, then, she declares, she will grab the first e man she sees and hurl him into the nearest registry office. No doubt go will contrive to be that man.

He has the best chance, for he sees her almost every other day, and y go here, there, and everywhere together. Both of them—as every- ly should realise by this time—make absurdly large sums of money. sie talks gravely enough about her salary, being nothing if not a child the theatre, but to Inigo the whole thing is still an elaborate joke. watches with droll amazement the rising tide of performing fees, et-music royalties, gramophone royalties, and so forth. Mr. Pitsner l seems a quite unreal person, and Inigo would never be very surprised he money Mr. Pitsner hands over suddenly melted into thin air or ned, like fairy gold, into a heap of withered leaves on the bank counter. It is incredible that he should make so much money out of wh seems to him a mere parlour trick. His writing, however, is a very seri business. He has published a volume of essays, so sternly literary tha is almost impossible to read them, entitled *The Last Knapsack a* *Other Papers.* The only copy ever seen is in Miss Dean's dressing-roo She pretends to laugh at it, but in secret she is rather proud of the f that it is dedicated "To Susie, the Best Companion," and she is det mined to read it all through, one day. Inigo says that the book has h such a poor sale simply because he was foolish enough to publish it his own expense. The next book, now in preparation, is to be broug out at the expense of the publisher, who will then be compelled, Ini declares, to make everybody read it.

Sometimes, but chiefly in the way of business, they meet Jerry Jer ingham, who is, perhaps, rather plumper than he was, in spite of di and massage and exercises. He is, of course, one of the most successf young men on the light musical stage. Now that he has triumphant acquired an American accent, a perpetual reminder of his season Broadway, he is busy building his own theatre. The fact that it is have no pit is desolating many of the outer suburbs. Mrs. Jerningha is not a public figure, and, indeed, is rarely seen these days. Now ar then, however, she lunches with Susie, who listens very sympathetical to an account of all her troubles. This account is always liberally pun tuated with the cry: "But don't think for a moment, my dear, that I' sorry I married him."

Jimmy Nunn, Joe and Mrs. Joe, are still in concert party work, an lately concluded a successful season with "The Red Revellers" at eith Rhyl or Llandudno. Jimmy's digestion is beginning to trouble him agai and he admits that he is not as young as he was, so that the sooner he able to run a little show of his own, the better. There is some talk his managing it this coming season. George is still something of charge on his parents, being apprenticed to the motor trade, but ver soon he will be earning his own living, and then Joe and Mrs. Joe wi —as they say—"look about for something." What that something wi be they have not yet quite decided. Joe still favours a seaside hote and Elsie Dulver, who saw them at Eastbeach, has promised her assis ance in finding one, and Inigo and Susie have both offered them a sub ntial loan. Mr. Morton Mitcham is no longer a performer; he has ne into management—at least, that is how he puts it—though actually is nothing more nor less than the manager of the pier at—where do u think?—why, of all places, Sandybay. He is now one of the figures the town, and is forever discovering old acquaintances from the East ong the anglers who drink Scotch every morning and evening in the le bar at the end of the pier. He is regarded with something like e by every younger member of a visiting troupe, because, it appears, vas he and no other who discovered Susie Dean and Jerry Jerningham, d those who doubt his word are invited to call at his lodgings and for themselves certain bills, programmes, and photographs.

The McFarlanes have settled in Edinburgh, where Hugh has a fine ctice and also lectures grimly at the University from time to time. He published a very small book with an enormous title—it begins with *ne Observations on the Parathyroid Glands,* and then goes on and *With Special Reference,* and so forth—and Paris and Vienna think re is something in it, whereas Leipzig and Chicago are not very e. Mrs. McFarlane is even less certain, but, on the other hand, is posi- that though Hugh is doing far too much, he is looking much better n he did, don't you think? I am sorry to say that Mrs. McFarlane, ugh the wife of one of Edinburgh's most respected citizens and the ghted mother of two small and very fat boys, has a secret vice. Now again she likes to sneak away, buy *The Stage,* and devour it in a ner. If you went in very quickly, you might easily catch her, one , smiling at the advertisements: "Wanted Known. . . . A Riot at le Sandmouth, last . . ." Sometimes Hugh has to go up to London, then she tears herself away from the fat little boys and accompanies , and then she sees Susie and Inigo and perhaps watches Jerry's beau- l capers from a stall. There are letters, too, of course. Incidentally, surprising what letters Mrs. Joe can write. The matter is humble ugh—the old stories of pier pavilion audiences, queer lodgings, and day trains—but the penmanship is at once flowing and exquisite, and style worthy of Lord Chesterfield himself. I do not say that Mrs. always writes like this, but those are the sort of letters Mrs. McFar- receives from her, once in a while.

Then there is Mr. Oakroyd, far away in Canada, or, to be exact,
Pittford Falls, Ontario. Here we come to a difficulty. The troubl
that nobody has been out to Canada and that any news of him can o
trickle through those craggy little letters of his. It is certain that h
a very proud grandfather, that he and his son-in-law, Jack Clough,
now running some good, solid tradesmanlike business of their o
and that everybody there is very well, thank you. I know that Mr. O
royd does not live with his daughter, but has a little place of his o
just down the road, where he can smoke a pipe over his three weeks'
copy of the Saturday sports edition of the *Bruddersford Evening*
press, which is sent out to him regularly by S. Oglethorpe, Town E
Wabley, Yorks. Moreover, I gather that Pittford Falls regards him a
man with vast theatrical experience and a topographical authority on
Mother Country. The photographs that Susie sent out, and the box
gramophone records, including *Slippin' Round the Corner* sung a
played in half a dozen different ways, that Inigo gave him, these thi
have only confirmed and increased his reputation. There is no do
that he is enjoying life, but apparently there are drawbacks. Thus
seems that Pittford Falls has a nasty trick of being either too hot or
cold; there are no cosy little public-houses, and the club that he
joined is not really an adequate substitute; the tobacco is too sweet,
a patch on *Old Salt;* stoves are not up to much when you have be
used to sitting in front of a kitchen range where there has been a bit
baking going on, perhaps, during the day; and there is a queer, e
look about the place. For some time now, I hear, they have been
ning a trip to the Old Country, and Mr. Oakroyd admits that he
for a sight of good old Bruddersford. Whether he is as happy the
he thought he would be, I do not know, though not for the world w
he venture far from Lily and the two children, for they are all for
having "a bit o' fun." We must leave it at that. In this place, whe
we call it Bruddersford or Pittford Falls, perfection is not to be fou
neither in men nor in the lot they are offered, to say nothing of the ta
we tell of them, these hints and guesses, words in the air and gesticulati
shadows, these stumbling chronicles of a dream of life.

THE END

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THE GOOD COMPANIONS
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